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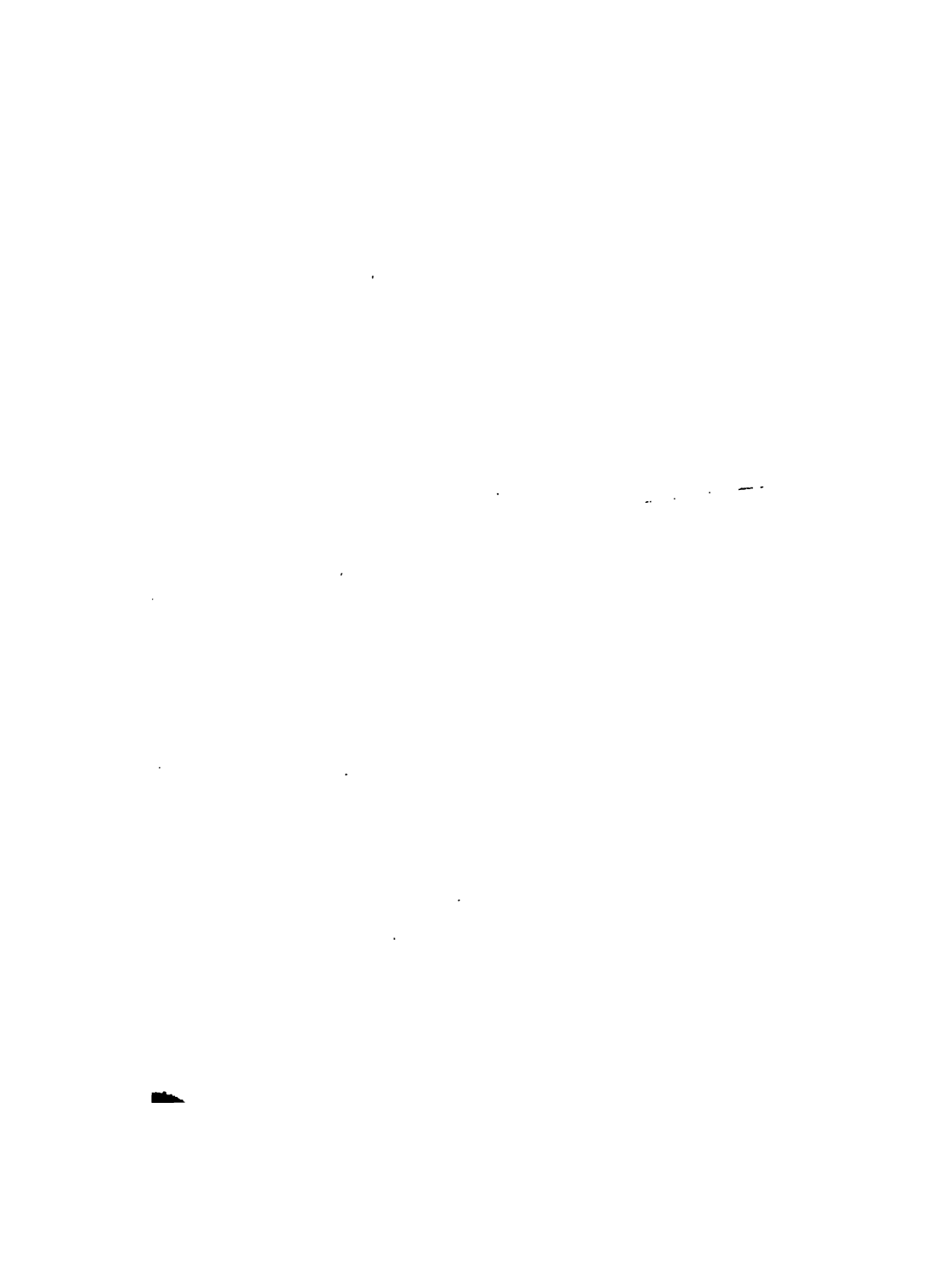






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**“I mean it,”** she mumbled. “I hate you, but I’ll save him”  
See page 414

# THE STORM SIGNAL

10469

By

GUSTAVE FREDERICK MERTINS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
ARTHUR I. KELLER

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**TO  
MY MOTHER**



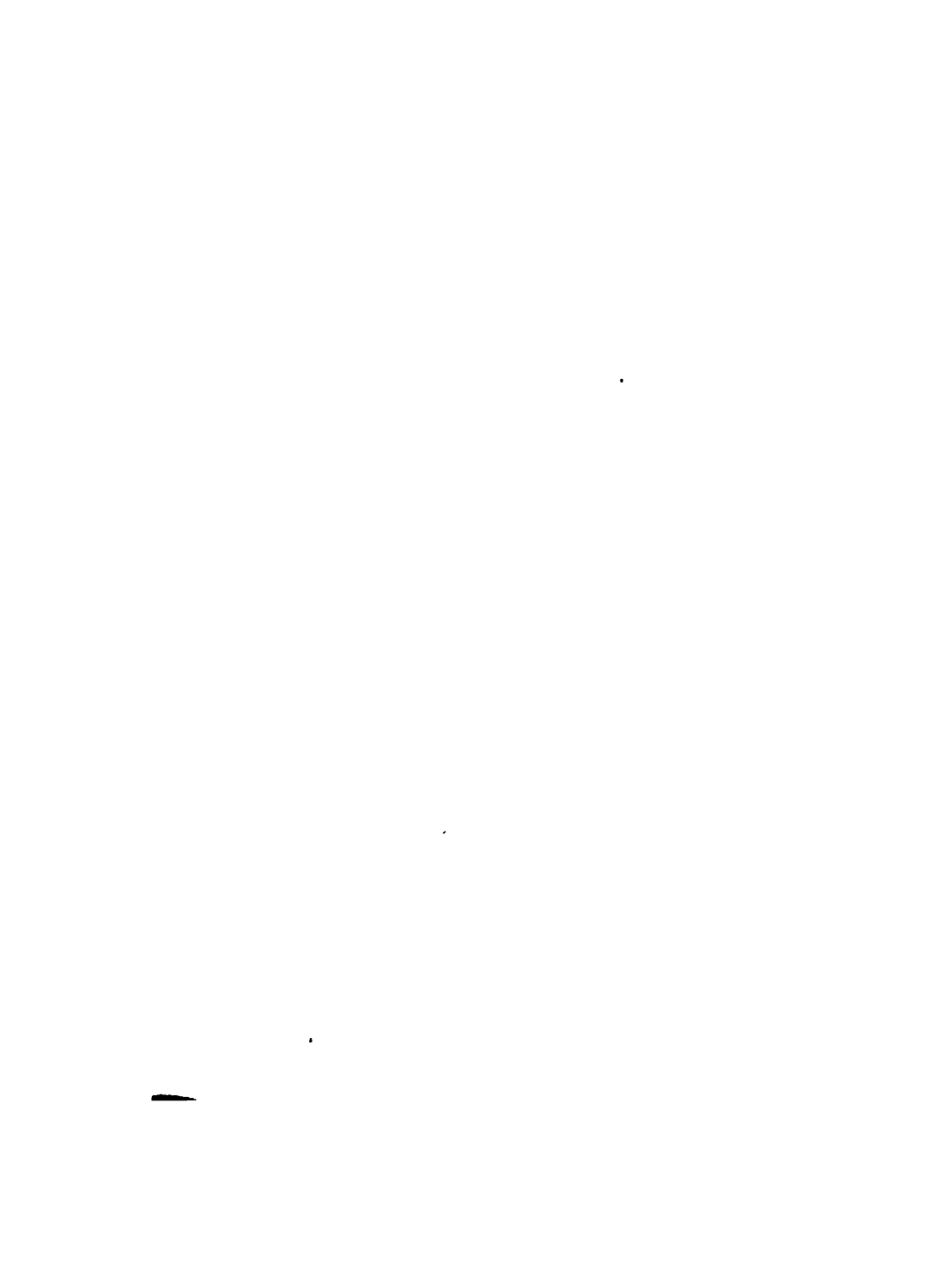
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**THE STORM SIGNAL**



# THE STORM SIGNAL

## CHAPTER I

### IN SCHOOL DAYS

The little girl stood at bay.

"Who are you, anyhow?" hissed one of her tormentors. "Your ol' gran'daddy was nothing but a low-down slave-driver, that's all,—so you needn't try to put on airs with me, Miss Smarty."

"And he was a raggetty old miser, too, that hid his money in cracks in the wall," added a second, sticking out his tongue to emphasize his contempt.

"And was a coward and wouldn't fight in the war," chimed in a third.

The little girl stood for a moment, dazed. Then she drew herself erect, but the tears slowly gathered in her eyes. She pinched her lips tightly together and endeavored to repress the evidences of her emotion.

"Look, look!" cried one. "Miss High-and-Mighty is climbin' down."

Suddenly a small boy broke through the circle that had gathered about her and caught the last speaker roughly by the coat.

"You come down to the spring, you sneak," he cried, "and I'll fix you for that!"

Away the crowd surged, caught by the interest in the proposed combat, leaving her standing alone, save for one little girl, who put her arm about her and sought to comfort her.

Slowly the two entered the school-house, although it was the hour for the noon recess, and there, the one in grief and the other as a comforter, they awaited the ringing of the bell that would summon the scholars once more to their studies.

At last they came, settling noisily in their places, their faces glowing with excitement over the things that had come to pass. Then the teacher entered and a silence fell on them. His dark eyes sought out two faces.

"Walter Tiffin and Will Johnson, you have been fighting," he said slowly. "Were any weapons used?"

The two remained silent.

"No, sir," replied some one; "they fought fair."

"You will both stay in when school is dismissed," said the teacher. Then he looked sharply at one of them.

"You had better go and wash your face, Walter," he continued in a more kindly tone. "You ought to have more sense than to fight Will; he is too big for you."

A small boy with black hair and eyes rose from his seat in silence and went stumbling out of the room, holding a handkerchief to his nose.

The teacher regarded him for a moment. There was a smile on his lips. "A manly chap!" he murmured beneath his breath. Then he turned once more to his duties.



"I shall now hear the first class in geography," he said, and the first class in geography endeavored to give him its wandering attention.

All through this long afternoon in May the school-room hummed and dozed and drowsed: Small eyes gazed out of the windows to the green of the trees and the inviting stretch of the play-grounds, and little minds dreamed on things far away from the tattered books that lay spread before them.

The school-house stood near the Union Church, half-hidden behind a grove of mighty oaks. The road that ran before it extended on through the village, down the hill and across the river. This was Granville's principal thoroughfare. Among the whites it never had a name, and the negroes called it simply the Big Road.

By its weed-grown margins wound sandy pathways, and along these the villagers footed their way to church, to the stores, and in pursuit of their simple pleasures and duties. The road was shaded by water-oaks, and here and there a tall locust thrust out crooked branches and waved its ragged foliage for the sun to drift through.

Situated in southern Alabama and lying, as it did in the early eighties, a great many miles from any railroad, Granville knew little of commercial energy or activity. The few stores did a lazy, old-fashioned business, and their weather-beaten, box-shaped forms showed few outward evidences of prosperity. The volume of business carried on was, however, quite large, and the heavily-loaded wagons that went rambling and clicking out to the plantations and timber camps carried

away goods upon which a considerable profit had been made.

It was the timber business that carried Granville through the depression that immediately followed the war, until the agricultural interests could be righted and the fields began once more to yield their returns. Slowly the village regained a portion of its former prosperity, until at last a stability came to it that could be shaken only by some great misfortune.

It was not the season for trade, but one lone horse, gnawing at the rack to which his rope bridle was attached, betokened that somewhere in one of the dingy stores there lounged a chance country purchaser, who waited for the mail to come in.

Presently, from the road leading to the north, a buggy turned into the empty street and went whirring along the sandy road leading toward the school. It was new and well cared for, and the horse which drew it was a beautiful bay, whose coat fairly shone in the sunlight.

Near the school, the driver turned out from the road and drew rein under the oaks and waited. He was a tall, white-haired and white-bearded old negro, who held his head high, and, when he had stepped from his conveyance, stood regarding it with undisguised satisfaction.

In a few minutes a door in the school-house opened and a little girl about eight years of age came down the steps, holding a lunch-basket in one hand and a book-satchel in the other. The old negro turned at her approach; a smile brightened his face, and, lifting his hat, he swept her a courtly bow.

"Bress my heart, li'l mistis des been er-studyin' her preshis eyes out!" he said softly.

To this the child vouchsafed no reply. Her head was held proudly, and he noticed for the first time that her face was pale and on her cheeks were the traces of tears. Her lips quivered, but she strove bravely to overcome her emotion and, succeeding in this, she tossed the basket and the satchel into the foot of the buggy and climbed to her seat without waiting for assistance.

The old negro eyed her for a moment in open-mouthed astonishment. She had not spoken one word of greeting to him, and he felt deeply hurt. Taking up the reins silently, he seated himself, and, clucking to the horse, turned back toward Granville with his chin high in the air.

Virginia Traylor, for this was the little girl's name, lived about three miles north of the village. It was her custom to ride to school each morning, remaining during the day and leaving in the afternoon about an hour earlier than the other children on account of the distance to her home.

To-day there was evidently some sorrow that oppressed her or some keen grief that filled her heart, and, as the old negro turned from the village into the homeward road, he pondered deeply over the situation, and his chin sank lower and lower. The look of resentment and offense disappeared from his face, and in its place there crept the reflection of protecting sympathy and affection.

At last he turned to her, and his voice was soft and filled with a reverential tenderness.




"Honey, whut's er trubblin' yer? Who done hurt de li'l lady's feelin's an' mek her fergit po' ol' Unc' Ephraham, so dat she cain' han' him out her howdy-do?"

The child's gray eyes stared straight ahead, seeing, as it seemed, into the infinite distance. Pride showed in every line of her face, in the curl of her lip, in the pose of her head, in the poise of her body. Then her lip began to quiver and her eyes slowly filled with tears. There was a tremulous heaving of her bosom, and suddenly she bowed her head and began to sob brokenly and bitterly; and, as she wept, she told him of her anger and her grief.

While at play during the noon recess that day she had, together with her desk mate, Jessica Brantley, who lived in the village, become engaged in a controversy with some of her playmates. Quick-witted and high-spirited, she had quickly overcome them, when, suffering under the gibes of defeat hurled at them by others, some of the smaller boys had avenged themselves by the direct insults that had silenced and crushed her with humiliation, although she had striven so hard, so hard! to conceal this from them. Her pride was very strong.

And much that they had said of her grandfather's life was true. She had learned from her own people that he had hidden his great wealth somewhere, and that he had at last been murdered by a band of negroes to whom he had refused to reveal its hiding-place. The other things had, however, been kept from her until to-day, when they had been hurled at her with suddenness and brutality. And now she knew it all. The old



negro's eyes shone with rage as he listened to the halting, broken telling of the story.

"Oh, ef I wuz des white," he cried, "wouldn' I lar-rup dat trash, ter talk ter my young mistis datter way! I'd des git me er black snake an' cut um ter er frazzle. An' dat li'l Walter Tiffin, dat sho is er white folks' white boy. Dat's er li'l gemman right, ter fight fer yer datter way. Dat show whut blood an' raisin' 'll do! Hush, honey! Hush cryin' now! Us is gwine right home ter yo' ma, an' sech ernother lot uv pies an' knickknacks an' stuff ernother ez you gwineter git lak yer ain't neber seed biffo'!"

"I don't want any pies," she sobbed. "I want mother."

"In co'se yer does, honey, in co'se yer does; yer des wants yer ma rale bad." And then he continued softly: "An' she gwineter say: 'Why, Ferginia, darlin', whut you pay 'tention ter dem bad boys fer?' An' den ter-reckly evvybody gwineter pet yer some, an' bimeby yer gwineter stop an' study 'bout it, an' den yer des gwine-ter up an' laugh an' say: 'Shucks! Whut I keer 'bout dat ornry trash? I'm er lady; I'm folks, I is; I ain't des peoples.'"

No reply came, but the weary sobs continued.

"Aw, now, ef yer wuz des er boy stid uv er gal!" he exclaimed in a plaintive way, "I cu'd promus ter mek yer er flutter-mill er er kite, er er squirt-gun er sump'n 'nother lak dat; but bein' ez how yer is des er gal, I has ter set here an' 'magine dat I is er buttin' mer haid ergin er tree, er er pos' er sump'n 'nother, kase I's 'bout ter bubble up merse'f, wid all dat wailin' an' moanin' er-gwine on lak hit neber stop."

"That's what you always say,"—and the sobs began afresh. "You always want me to be a boy, just 'cause you know I'm not. And I don't want to be a boy, and I don't love you any more! and I don't love anybody but father and mother, and—and I wish I was ho-ome!"

"Dere now, I done gone done it ergin," groaned the luckless old negro in despair. "In co'se I doan' want yer ter be no boy. Who wants ter be er sorry, no-count, stick-whittlin' boy fitten fer nothin' seppen ter debble evvybody he knows an' ter fall in de crick an' git hisse'f drowned? I ain't got no manner uv use fer no boy. Er boy is de las' thing in de worl', yas sirree bob, an' er gal, she's er putty chil' whut evvybody lubs. An' look er here," he continued softly and coaxingly, "when yer grows up, yer gwineter be er fine lady an' hab silk dresses an' er big fine house an' horses an' kerridges. Den yer gwineter marry wid some fine young buck, an' I is gwineter stan' out on de back po'ch an' watch de dancin' an' all de big shine. Den yer gwineter come an' look at me an' smile an' say: 'Why, dere's Unc' Ephraam, bress his ol' soul!' An' den I is gwineter stan' dere an' bat mer eyes rale fas' an' gwineter say: 'Lawdy, Lawdy, am dis here my young mistis, er is dis here some angel ernother come down f'um—"

"I don't want to get married! I wouldn't marry anybody, but,—but maybe Walter,—and I wish I was home!"

"G'lang dere, Richmon'!" shouted the old negro in a desperate voice. "Git ober dat road lak yer neber did git ober hit biffa'."

When they whirled up before the Traylor home,

Virginia did not wait for the old negro to help her from the buggy, but sprang out and fled, sobbing, to her mother's arms, leaving him standing watching her in despair.

"Whew!" he muttered, mopping his handkerchief across his forehead in a dazed way. "I sho is glad her ma's got her."

Now and then, while unharnessing Richmond, he paused to repeat to himself: "Yas sirree bob, I sho is glad her ma's got her. I hed done hoed mer row."

That evening, as Virginia sat sadly poring over her geography, she heard some one out in the yard whistling aimlessly. She recognized the whistler and began to fidget. Again he passed the window and, after a few minutes, she heard him thumping a banjo somewhere out in the back yard. He seemed to be tuning his instrument, but it was evidently a difficult job, for he worked at it a long while.

At last he seemed satisfied, and she heard the familiar sound of *De Hawg an' de Sheep*. She began to study aloud to drown the melody that was drawing her attention from her book. Then she heard:

"De Hawg an' de Sheep er trottin' thu de paster,  
Hawg say: 'Sheep, cain' yer trot a little faster—'"

Virginia looked across at her mother with beseeching eyes.

"May I go for a little while, mother?" she asked. "Just a little bit o' while; a teeny, tinchy bit o' while, please ma'am?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Traylor, "but put on your jacket."

Virginia quickly slipped it on and raced through the hall to the back door; then she paused, and, opening the door slowly and with much dignity, she walked out on the back porch.

Old Ephraim was sitting on the steps and spied her the moment she opened the door, having heard her footsteps in the hall. He bent over his banjo and began to work at the strings.

"I des 'clare ter gracious," he muttered aloud, "hit look lak I cain' fix dese here strings ter dis here banjo."

Virginia came and sat quietly on the top step. He looked up in feigned astonishment.

"Lawsy mussy, is dat you?" he asked. "I 'lowed dat you had done gone ter bed."

"Play something!" she commanded, her elbow on her knee and her chin in her hand.

"Oh, I doan' know dat dey is air law whut say dat I got ter play nothin'," he replied.

"I want you to play," she said.

"Wouldn't be s'prised ef yer 'lowed yer wuz de law yerse'f," he responded with a sniff. "Yer played de cry-baby business on me ter-day, an' I doan' mek no tchunes fer no cry-babies."

She rose haughtily and started toward the door.

"I am going in then," she said.

"Naw, yer ain't," he replied quickly, half-rising to his feet. "Doan' yer see I is er-tchunin' dis here banjo ez fas' ez I kin? I 'low yer mus' be de law, anyhow."

She returned slowly, and with becoming dignity, and sat down.

"I am the law," she said firmly.

"An' de gawspell, too, I reckon," he grunted.

"I am not the gospel," she replied.

"Yas," he continued, "I reckon yer mus' be de gawspell, too, 'cordin' ter John. Yer gits so brash sometimes tel I cain' mek up mer min' ef yer doan' believ dat yer raly is bofe de law an' de gawspell."

"I'm going, if you don't stop," she replied.

"I done hush," he said. "Didn't yer hear me when I hush?"—and he chuckled over his speech. "I hush so sudden I could hear hit merse'f,"—and he laughed again.

"Play *The Hooraw Nest*," she commanded, smiling at his mirth.

"Now, how did yer know dat I wuz er gwineter play dat?" he asked. "Mer fingers been er-eachin' ter play it." So he strummed on the banjo and then began to sing:

"Oh, hit's down in de swamp in er big gum-tree,  
 De bigges' ol' gum dat I eber did see;  
 Er mile f'um de groun' an' er foot f'um de sky,  
 Oh, I tell yer dat nes' am er hangin' mighty high.  
 Hit's er Hooraw Nes'; hit's er Hooraw Nes'.  
 An' down at de bottom 'mongst de water an' de slush,  
 De alligator tail go *swish, swash, swash*;  
 An' whut gits bawn f'um de Hooraw aigs,  
 Dey got no wings an' dey got no laigs;  
 Dem's Hooraws, great big Hooraws.

"When de moon done gone an' de ghostes walk,  
 Den de Hooraw Bird, she mek er big squawk,  
 An' yer soul gits ter slippin' an' yer chis' gits er pain,  
 An' yer foots gits tangle', dough de road mighty plain.  
 Yer studyin' 'bout runnin', but hit ain' no use,  
 Fer she trabble thu de air lak lightnin' juice.

Yer neber would er 'lowed sech er bird been bawn  
 Tel she come erlang squawkin' lak Gab'el's hawn.  
 Oh, Lawd, dem Hooraws! Sech Hooraws!

"Dey mouf lak er fireplace, face lak er snake,  
 Neck 'bout ez long ez er gyardin' rake;  
 Got er body lak er ostrick an' teef lak er b'ar,  
 Body all kivered wid yaller green ha'r.  
 Des ez sho yer git ter sinnin' dat bird gwineter come  
 She nibble at yer heart an' she gobble at yer breas',  
 An' tote yer right off ter de Hooraw home.  
 Tek keer an' keep out f'um de Hooraw Nes'!  
 Um-umph! Dat Hooraw Nes'.  
 Yas, Lawd! Dat Hooraw Nes'.  
 Tek keer an' keep out f'um de Hooraw Nes'."

When he had finished the song, he laid his banjo  
 across his knee and looked up at her.

"Unc' Eph," she asked, "what does a Hooraw Nest  
 look like?"

He paused a moment.

"Dat depen'," he said evasively, "but dey is all built  
 keerless. Now, yer know, when er 'oman doan' tek no  
 keer uv her haid an' her hyar all git tangle an' swuffed  
 up lak de rats been in it, dat's when dey sez dat dat  
 'oman's haid, hit look lak er Hooraw Nes'. Dey is er  
 tale 'bout dat."

"What is the tale?" she asked. "You never told  
 me."

He reached in his pocket and took out a piece of to-  
 bacco, then slid over on the edge of the steps.

"I des wants ter git whar I kin spit in de yard," he  
 explained, as he took a big chew.

"Yer know," he said at last, slowly and reflectively,  
 "evvything dey is, hit got er reason ter be an' evvy-

thing dey is, hit bleedged ter got er beginnin'." He paused for this piece of philosophy to be fully grasped by his audience. "Dat's how come dis here tale. Long time ergo," he continued slowly, "dey wuz er drunk nigger er runnin' erway f'um his marster thu er swamp in de night-time. He had er lot uv mean pine-top lick'er an' he kep' er guzzlin' at dat lick'er ez he went erlong, tel bimeby, atter some time, he got pow'ful wobblety in de laigs an' got ter rasslin' roun' thu dat swamp des ez limber ez er buzzard whut's tryin' fer ter walk biggety. Den atter while, he got ter whoopin' an' er hollerin' plumb scan'lous, an' fus' thing dat nigger knowed, right dere in de swamp he spy de Hooraw Bird. Hit ain't plain in de tale whut come ter 'rive twix' him an' her, seppen dat he sorter went crazy in de haid f'um dat time on. Dat wuz de startin' uv de Hooraw Bird, an' eber since dem days yer hatter sorter be keerful 'bout er heap er things, 'kase she done got so she ain't stickin' ter no intickler line. She gwine fer sinners evvy pop outen de box an' she des tek any sort she kin fin'."

Virginia sat silent for some time.

"Unc' Eph," she asked at last, "did you ever see a Hooraw Bird?"

He rolled his eyes up at her in astonishment at her question.

"Who, me?" he asked.

"Um-umph, you," she said.

"Wall, I tell yer, honey," he replied slowly, "yer know dat yer Unc' Ephraham he ain't gwineter tol' yer no story, an' bein' ez how he ain't gwineter tol' yer no story, he bleedged ter 'spon' back dat he ain' sho



in he min' ef he is seed air Hooraw Bird er no. He is sho seed some cur'us doin's in he time, dough."

"Did you ever know anybody who saw one?" she queried.

"Suttenly, suttenly," he replied. "I sho is. I is knowed mo' 'an one dat seed um an' I is satisfy in mer min' dat I is heerd um merse'f. Doan' ax me no mo' 'bout um now, 'kase yer pa done gib me er scotchin' 'bout tellin' yer tales lak dem. De time I tol' yer 'bout de *OO-Hoos*, yer slep' wid yer haid onder de kiver fer er mont'. Yer hadn' orter do datter way, hit frustrate de hinjymint uv tellin' de tale."

"I can't help it," she murmured with a shiver, drawing her jacket closer about her. "I like to hear the tales, but I get scared about them afterward."

"Yas," he said slowly, "I des wishes sometimes—" and he broke off his speech abruptly.

"I know what you wish all the time," she said plaintively.

"Naw, I doan'," he replied quickly. "I doan' wish yer wuz no boy; no sirree. I wuz des er-studyin' 'bout dat while ergo, an' I sez ter merse'f: I'm sho is glad dey ain't no harum-scarum boy at de big house. I'm boun' he'd des put hyar in mer pipe an' stuff mer chimney wid rags so ez ter run me outen mer house lak er rabbit outen er holler; an' I bet he cut up so scan'lous I des hatter go ter he daddy an' tell him dat I des hatter leab de place. I des natchelly couldn' stay on no place whar dere wuz air boy. I des gether up mer doll-rags an' light out f'um dere ez mad ez er passle er hornets."

"I wish I was a boy," she said with a sigh.

"Whut would yer do?" he asked quickly.

"Put hair in your pipe and stuff your chimney with rags." Old Ephraim slapped his thigh and chuckled gleefully.

"I'm boun' yer would," he replied. He leaned over and spit in the yard and then continued to rock backward and forward, laughing softly to himself. "I'm boun' yer would des raise hallyloojer-happy-lan' all de time."

"I would," she replied firmly.

He chuckled again. She puckered her forehead, clenched her hands and her eyes grew hard.

"I would fight, too," she said. "I know lots of boys I would whip if I was a boy." He gazed up at her in unfeigned admiration.

"Um-umph!" he said softly, "now cudden' I show yer er heap er tricks 'bout dat." He sat thoughtful for a moment. "Dere is de black-snake lock an' de grape-vine twis' an' 'bout er million mo' whut I knows. When he dive low, why, den you dive low an' butt him in de face. Lawdy, Lawdy!" he said, "me an' you cu'd whup de whole settlemint." He sat for a moment gazing dreamily out into the darkness. "De on'y kin' er man whar yer ain't got no showin' am er lef'-handed man whut's cross-eyed. Dem sort is sholy hard ter hinder, dey is so onsartin in dey movemints." He looked up at her again.

"Oh, shucks!" he exclaimed; "whut is I er-doin', talkin' ter er little gal 'bout fightin'? I orter be ershame'."

They sat silent for some moments, each following a different line of thought. He, in memory, was back among the companions of his boyhood days in Vir-

ginia, while she sat thinking of the insults that had been heaped upon her by her schoolmates. Suddenly he turned and gazed up at her.

"Yer better be cr-gittin' in de house now, honey," he said. "Yer ma gwinter be er-callin' yer terreckly, an' den she lay all de blame on me."

Virginia rose sorrowfully.

"Good night, Unc' Eph," she said.

"Good night, honey," he replied gravely in his softest voice.

She entered the house and left him sitting on the steps, buried in deep thought.

"Hit cain' be help," he murmured at last with a sigh, as he arose and walked slowly down the steps. "Hit cain' be help, but I reckon dat I'd mighty nigh gib dis here right han' ef dey wuz er boy on dis place." Here he sighed deeply and tucked his banjo under his arm. "De yearth an' de stars an' all de ellymints cudden buy dat li'l angel gal, but when de heart air hongry fer er boy, hit do look lak yer des natchelly cain' git 'long widout none."

Much against her will, little Virginia had to go back to school the following morning; and this was the first great grief of her life. On the road, old Ephraim tried to entertain her with the same old stories of the wonders "up on de Ro'noke Ribber," where he was born, but she was not interested in them. He went so far as to try his old joke about "de gin'l wid de des-keep-on-er-laffin'" name, so as to have her correct him and say, "General Lafayette, Unc' Eph," but she would not notice it. He relapsed into silence, and when he helped her from the buggy at the school door he only

said softly: "Good-by, honey! Tek good keer yo'se'f," and drove sadly homeward.

She marched into school with her little chin ridiculously high in air and a sniff of contempt for the common herd of gigglers. She had not been able to learn that the things that had been said concerning her grandfather were untrue, and the burden of the charges weighed heavily upon her baby heart. She stiffened her neck, and at any accusing glance her face took on a haughty look in spite of the sob in her throat. She had to stay at the school, and she felt that this was the only way to make her fight.

At the noon recess she wandered about with chubby little Jessica Brantley, each with her arm about the other and both whispering those wonderful secrets which little girls have to tell and which no man ever knows.

After a while the bell rang for the pupils to return to their studies and, as Virginia turned toward the hated place, her bosom heaved and there lay in her saddened gray eyes the reflection of that pitiless law, the second of the ancient ten.

## CHAPTER II

### THE NEGRO IN THE RED SHIRT

Along a country road in southern Alabama in the month of June, in the year 189—, a negro was walking. He was about six feet tall, was broad-shouldered, and his frame was powerfully knit. His features were heavy and a scraggy beard grew upon his face. His small, deep-set eyes, of which but little of the whites could be seen, gleamed with rather more intelligence than is usually seen in those of a country negro. In his left hand he carried a bundle, saddled across which hung a pair of coarse shoes. In his right was a heavy stick. His clothing consisted of a pair of loose breeches held up by a leathern belt. A red woolen undershirt and a faded felt hat, from which the ribbon had long since departed, completed his dress. In his ears were small gold ear-rings. He was barefoot.

He was walking along with a swinging, flat-foot stride, the sun beating down on his head, and on his face the drops of sweat gathered to fall unnoticed. Now and then they ran from his forehead and trickled to his eyelashes, when a sweep of the arm in the red undershirt wiped them away.

On the left of the road which the negro followed was a thick wood and on the right a worm fence inclosing a

field. In the corners of the fence next to the road grew sassafras bushes and bamboo vines, while some prickly-ash trees, whose tops were often covered with a thick bower of grape-vine or wild smilax, were scattered here and there. The road was shaded from the left and, as he passed under a broad-branched oak, he paused to listen to a number of blue jays that were quarreling high in its top. He gazed up at them with a smile, and then hummed low :

“Ol’ cow died in de fork uv de branch,  
Jaybird whistled an’ de monkey danced.”

The negro seemed to take more than ordinary interest in the scenes through which he was passing. A mocking-bird came flying across the field and dropped with a swing into a low china-tree that grew just inside the fence. The bird settled himself and took up his song, and the negro paused to listen with unconcealed delight.

“Markin’-bird sho,” he muttered. “Hit sho ain’t nuffin’ sep er ol’-time markin’-bird.”

So he plodded on his way, now between fields of cotton and corn and again through thickets of old-field pines, where the straw lay deep under foot. A light breeze had sprung up and he unbuttoned the red undershirt that the cool air might reach his skin. When he pulled the undershirt aside he exposed to view, branded upon his black and sweaty breast just over the heart, a letter L. The skin at the edges of the letter was drawn and seamed, but the scar itself stood out as clear and distinct as the fresh mark of a vigorously-applied whip-lash might do. Just above the scar there

hung, dangling from a leather cord about the negro's neck, a small pouch about two inches square, made of very heavy though pliable leather.

The man continued on his way through the woods, and after walking a long while he came to a tall poplar that stood near a clear, cool spring. It was now about the noon hour and, sitting down in the shade, he took from his bundle a piece of sausage and some bread and, leaning back against the tree, began to eat. When he had finished, he drank his fill from the spring and then lay down to rest and to think over his plans.

Many years had passed since this negro's foot had pressed the soil of Alabama—years of hardship and of toil beneath a tropic sun. He lay there, friendless and alone, thinking over it all in dumb sorrow, and in his heart there raged a fierce hatred for the white man—hatred for what he had undergone and, mingled with it, a joy that the days of toil were almost over and luxury and splendor would soon be his.

As he lay thus his half-savage mind pictured future delights that shifted and shaped themselves in as varied and beautiful colors as the lights in a kaleidoscope. Each train of thought shook the imagination for a moment and another dream shot forth, glistening with beauty and shedding satisfaction and contentment on his heart.

Afar off in the woods he heard the jangle, jangle of a cow-bell; farther and farther it wandered, farther and fainter. A vision of a great white road drifted before him. A number of negro children were playing in the dusk and a little white boy was with them. He was their king, and they served him and did his will.

The mellow sound of a cow-bell from the lot came faint and low. There was the far call of a sweet voice, and the king must go. He vanished from sight and his black vassals stood about in a haze. Larger their shapes grew and dimmer. Their outlines wavered and rocked like clouds in a wind. Away they melted, away, away. The negro had fallen asleep.

He started finally at the cry of a blue jay, sprang to his feet and, after glancing for a moment at the sun, picked up his burden with a sigh and continued on his way.

All during the afternoon the negro kept up the same swinging gait, and just as darkness began to gather and leather-wing bats were zigzagging and circling over his head, he climbed a long hill and stood gazing through the gloom over the wide fields of cotton and corn that lay on either side of the road.

Some four hundred yards ahead of him, and to the left of the road, stood a great white house, at whose windows lights were beginning to appear. He drew in a deep, quick breath and his face quivered with emotion.

"Ah!" he murmured. "De Traylor place; de ol' home!"

He walked slowly down the road in the direction of the house and at last mounted the fence and sat gazing steadily through the dim light at the scene that lay before him. How well he remembered it all, and how well he knew the unhappy story of the grim-faced, sad-eyed man who had built it and dwelt there! He had come back after long years of absence, and the story lingered across his mind and would not leave him.



He saw again, as in a dream, the flickering light of a pine-knot fire at the house of Ephraim, his grandfather, before which he, then a little boy, was sitting, watching the old negro mend a pair of shoes. Suddenly the door swung open and then closed, and a giant black man strode up and down the floor and raved and wrung his hands, as he told how negroes had come in the night and murdered William Traylor, his master, in an attempt to extort from him a confession as to where he had hidden his money. He remembered, too, how, in later years, this black man, Ni-jim, his father, had told him the story of the man Traylor, and he realized now how that story had affected his own life and brought him many years of sorrow and hardship.

That great house had been built by William Traylor long before the war, and there he had brought his Northern bride, who, some years later, had left him and gone to her old home in Boston, taking with her little William, their only child. This boy had been his young master and playmate, and he remembered vaguely the day when the lad went away. There had been some quarrel about the slave question, and that was all he knew. It seemed now only a story of sorrow mixed with the mystery of hidden gold, for he remembered how, when he had hung wistfully about the yard, longing for the presence of young William, a strange man from Granville named Jacobson, with whom his master had been in partnership, had come to the house to purchase the other interest, and paid, it was said, a great deal of money for it.

Then had come the days when William Traylor had

bought and sold slaves. Numbers of strange negroes came, stayed a while and were then sold somewhere up in the prairie country. The house began to go to decay, grass grew in the yards and an air of gloom and neglect hung over the entire place; but through it all there came to him the memory of loneliness and the fear of the stern-faced, silent man who owned it all and whom he encountered from time to time as he wandered listlessly about.

Then came the war, when the young men from the surrounding country gathered in companies and went away. Later he remembered seeing blue-clad troops streaming through the land, with thieving bands of negroes following.

Over it all his mind sped and then back to the scene the last night at the house of Ephraim, his grandfather, when Ni-jim, who claimed to have been a king back in Africa, strode up and down the floor, covered with blood and weeping like a little child over the death of William Traylor, his master and the only man he loved.

“Go!” the black man had cried to old Ephraim. “Go to-morrow an’ stay at de house tel I come f’um Boston. I tek letter ter de wife whut show whar de gol’ am hid.”

Then, when the promise had been given, the man had swung his son Jim to his shoulder and, standing on the doorstep, had cried in a broken voice:

“Ah, Eph, in de heart it am de rainy day, it am de rainy day!”

Then they had gone out into the night,—the one in fear and the other in sorrow.

Now, the negro sat gazing steadily through the darkness, his eyes fixed upon the old familiar scene and his mind dwelling continually on the story that had been rehearsed to him so many, many times. Suddenly he gave a start of fear and straightened up.

"S'posen dey done got it," he muttered. "S'posen dey done got it an' gone!"

He fingered the little leather pouch that hung against his chest and then, as a new idea came to him, he slipped quickly from the fence into the field and placed his bundle in the corner among some weeds. Stooping low, with his stick in his hand, he crept along close to the fence until he reached a low inclosure of pickets that divided the field from the side yard. At one spot a row of fig-trees grew close to the fence, and inside of the yard there was much shrubbery. He swung himself lightly over and, creeping very quietly close to the house, squatted down behind some box-bushes and listened. Finally, somewhere at the back of the house, he heard a man's voice. He was calling to a negro.

"You, Shack?"

"Yas, suh, Mars' Willum," came the reply.

"You tell Uncle Ephraim that I want the carriage and horses to be in good shape to-morrow, for I am going in to Pendleton. Miss Virginia is coming home from school and will be here day after to-morrow."

"Yas, suh! I tell him right erway," responded the negro.

"And say, Shack!" continued the man, "you get that lot of eggs and take them in to Anderson and Tiffin's to-morrow. They are sending their wagon in to Pen-

dleton and want all that they can get, and I might just as well make something out of it."

"All right, suh! I do dat soon in de mawnin'," said Shack, as he turned away.

The voices ceased and the negro sank back and sat on the ground. He was quivering in every limb.

"Dat's him," he muttered hoarsely. "Dat's de young marster, an' dey ain't neber foun' dat money. He's er-sellin' aigs."

After a moment or two he rose softly and returned to the place where he had hidden his bundle. Taking it up, he walked slowly down the road, passing in front of the house and gazing in through the trees and shrubbery.

Once, after he had gone some distance, he paused under a mimosa tree and, turning, gazed back at it all again. Then, with a sigh of satisfaction, he resumed the swinging stride he had kept up all through the day and continued his way along the Granville road.

## CHAPTER III

### MARTIN WENTWORTH

The whistle blew for six o'clock, and slowly the machinery in the great lumber mill near Granville slacked, rumbled and ceased to run.

All day long the scream of the saws, eating their way through the sticks of yellow pine, had tortured the ear. The heavy fall of the slabs, the rattle of the carriages as they returned to the starting-place that the logs might be shifted, had followed with dreary regularity. The planers had sung their discordant song, and the jangle, rattle, scream and roar of the whole plant had jarred on the nerves of Martin Wentworth. He finished the work which the office of secretary and treasurer of the company required of him, and then, coming out on the veranda of the company's offices, he sat listlessly down and lighted his pipe. For a while he watched the mill-hands as they left the mill for their homes. They were all negroes. Then he turned his eyes toward the river, which flowed less than two hundred yards before and below him. A snag was projecting from the water and he watched it rising and falling, as the force of the current bobbed it under the surface, and then, whirling and eddying away, allowed it to lift its head again, black and glistening in the evening sun. So were his days, he thought; one was

bright with cheerfulness and hope and the next was under the wave; and this was one of his submerged days.

He had lain awake long the night previous, sleepless and unhappy. Why, he did not know. There was a restlessness in his heart, a want, a loneliness and an utter discontent.

He had risen that morning with the same gloom upon him, and it had clung to him all through the beautiful but dreary, dreary day. He laid his pipe aside; somehow he did not care for it. He cared for nothing, he told himself, nothing, nothing—and he kicked the balusters savagely. Finding that the blow hurt his foot, he kicked them again. Whirling his rocking chair round to rise, he stepped on his pipe and broke it; it was the best pipe he had and was just in the proper condition of mellowness. He gathered up the pieces and examined them regretfully, but, finding the pipe irreparably broken, he tossed the pieces into the yard.

“Oh, I’m sick of it; sick of it all!” he cried.

For a year he had been buried here in the heart of the pine forests, with the scream and roar of the mill machinery in his ears during working hours, and at night the *yoo-ooop*, *yoo-ooop*, *te-whackety*, *whackety* of innumerable frogs, broken only by the plaintive cry of some wandering night-bird, had come to him until he fell asleep.

He had left his home in Michigan the year before to take this position. His father was a large stock-holder in the concern and, shortly after Martin left his university, he had been sent  *nolens volens*  to learn the

lumber business in all its branches. The place paid him a good salary and, looking for nothing outside of this, he had found nothing.

The company had had a number of business transactions with Captain Brantley, an old Confederate soldier who lived in Granville, and on two occasions Martin had taken dinner at the captain's home. On one of these he had been left alone in the parlor with its old-fashioned mohair-covered furniture, and had stood for some time before the picture of a blue-eyed girl with wonderful brown hair and an exceedingly attractive face.

"My daughter Jessie," the captain explained on returning to the room. "Done some two years ago. She's off at school now; be back in June."

He had never met Jessica Brantley, but the captain, in talking to him a few days before, had said: "Jessie gives a party Wednesday evening,—come over. I told her I would ask you to come. You are rather oldish for a young fellow, and if you don't care for the society of the young people, why, I'll take you under my care and do the best I can for you."

He had pleaded work, but the captain, in a fatherly way, had answered: "Oh, come, wake up, Wentworth, get out of the rut! If you can't come to Jessie's party, why, go somewhere else sometime. You're getting that 'way-cross-the-field look in your eyes. You live too much in your own company and it isn't good for you. This is my invitation."

So he had promised to try to arrange to go, and this was Wednesday, and this promise it was that weighed on him,—for he told himself he did not want to go.

"Well," he sighed, "it's society now and country society at that."

When he arrived Mrs. Brantley marched herself straight into his heart by her greeting, and the chill and stiffness, and the feeling and fencing which one must undergo to swing in on the exact level of the gaiety or intellectuality of a crowd of strangers, was obviated by her. He was treated as an old friend; boys and girls interested themselves in him, and he soon felt very much at home and at his ease.

Jessica Brantley he found to be somewhat changed since the picture of her had been "done."

"So you are the hermit," she said, holding out her hand and smiling cordially; "the old young man of the woods. I am glad you came, and I am not going to let papa drag you off to his room and puff tobacco-smoke at you and tell you war stories."

He looked down at her and smiled. She was such a sweet-faced, merry-eyed bit of a little woman with bronze-brown hair, a pretty face and great baby eyes as blue as corn-flowers. Her greeting was cordial and friendly, and then, too, she was actually mothering him.

"Come," she said, "and I will introduce you to them all."

The rebellion in his heart against having to come was soon all gone, and he was indeed glad that Captain Brantley had pressed the invitation. He sat for a while talking with Jessica Brantley and, after the long, lonely year he had spent, it now seemed to him that all the attractive ways and sweetness of disposition of all the girls he had known had gathered to



mingle in the personality of the girl who sat beside him. She was dressed in a simple, white creation that looked soft and fluffy and cool, the kind that men so love. And how he did drink in the sight of her! At each turn of her feather fan, at each movement of her white fingers as they toyed with the ring at the end, at the joyousness of her laughter and at the clear, musical tones of her voice as she talked with him, he felt that he could purr like a cat at the hearth-corner in utter content.

The evening slipped away with amusements of various kinds. The relics of the refreshments had been cleared away, when the doors between the dining-room and the parlor were thrown open and some one touched the piano.

There was only one girl whom Martin had met during the evening whose greeting had seemed less cordial than the others. That girl was Virginia Traylor. There was nothing lacking in it that he could complain of, but, after meeting the others in the way he had, he had expected a little more—he didn't really know just what it was he had expected, but the failure to receive it stung him.

He had known of her as living some three miles from Granville and had on several occasions passed her home. The story of the death of her grandfather also had been related to him. During the evening he had from time to time furtively studied her. She was tall, in fact rather above the average height for a woman; her figure was good and she was graceful. Her hands,—well, he decided that he liked her hands. She had dark gray eyes that seemed to change to

violet and almost to black, when the light was not directly on them. Her hair was reddish brown, her forehead was broad and white, and her features, while a bit prominent, were regular. There was a proud curve to her rather short upper lip and a hint of strength and determination in her whole face.

"She's on the magnificent order," he said to himself.

So, as he sat and studied her, he found a shade of hauteur in her face, and the curved lips seemed to him to conceal cynicism and mockery. Certainly her eyes, with the long, dark lashes above them, were her best feature. He watched her once when she laughed and the shadow was entirely gone. There was a flash of white teeth and for a moment she seemed utterly joyous and happy. Then, as the laughter died away, it seemed to him that the lips had for a moment a droop of sadness, but it passed quickly away and the curl came back to them, making them seem harder and colder than before.

He disliked her cordially, of that he felt sure; and yet, when the strains of the waltz came, he found himself near her and, turning, looked into her eyes.

"May I?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered simply, and in a moment they whirled away with the others. The floor was not particularly good, but he found her a beautiful dancer and enjoyed the waltz. It seemed to him so very long since he had danced.

They scarcely spoke during the waltz and, when it was over, she was soon taken from him. She seemed popular, and she also seemed glad to go. This stung

him again. There was no doubt about it—she was cold, conceited, dreamy, wilful and—and despicable, he now told himself.

At the end of another dance he heard her talking with a young man named Walter Tiffin, the junior partner in the firm of Anderson and Tiffin, who conducted a general store in the town and had most of the business.

“Do you know, Walt,” she was saying, “we have on our place the strangest negro I ever saw. He worked as a field-hand until recently, but he seemed to be such a bright and willing negro that father now has him working about the stables and barn. He doesn’t seem able to pick much cotton, and asked father to give him that place, and he did so. Old Uncle Eph doesn’t like him at all, but I think it is because he himself has had full charge of that work for so long and a little jealousy has crept in. I hate to see Uncle Eph so jealous, because he knows full well we are going to take care of him for the rest of his days, whether he works or not. I understand about this negro, because I asked him one day why he speaks English so brokenly, and he told me that he was born in Jamaica,—had been a sailor most of his life and had lived so much with Spanish and Portuguese people that he had almost forgotten his English.”

“He must be the same negro who came here to Granville some months ago, wearing a red shirt,” said Tiffin. “A darky asked him what his name was and he would not reply, so they all began to call him Red Shirt. They seem to be afraid of him.”

“Well,” said Virginia laughingly, as she rose for an-

other dance, "I am not afraid of him. He is a bit of a curiosity, that is all."

To Martin, the evening was soon over, and when he stood again in his room he felt light-hearted and happy. Once, as he drove into a cool, dark grove on the road home, where the moonlight sifted through the trees, the memory of Jessica Brantley came to him and he startled his mare by singing out, "For she's a jolly good fellow!"

The contact and communion with women had softened him, and he realized this was what he needed. "And Jessica Brantley—" He sat for a while, smoking and thinking of Jessica Brantley. "Jess," they had called her, and he liked that better. "A charming girl," he thought. She had taken charge of him and had drawn him out and had seemed really interested. There were other girls who were rather attractive, in a way, but he did not care particularly for them. They seemed a bit shallow and commonplace, but she was not. And that other, Virginia Traylor, Virginia the magnificent,—she was peculiar and cynical, and he didn't like her at all. He couldn't understand why Jessica Brantley should say she was lovable and care so much for her.

"Why, Virginia Traylor, she's just the finest girl in the world, if you know her well and she likes you," she had said to him. "She and I roomed together at Hollins', up in Virginia, and we have always been chums."

"I don't like her," he said to himself again. He puffed dreamily at his pipe for a while. Yes, he was glad the negroes had killed her grandfather; he must

have been a beast. And what was the matter with her? Atavism, that was it. They came a little early,—but she had his traits.

Martin Wentworth's pride was wounded, but he did not know it. Even had he thought of it, he would hardly have cared to confess it.

Finally he undressed in a sleepy way. "Yes, Jess is all right, and that Traylor girl,—well, she's as cold as—as the moon!"

He puffed out the light, and Jessica Brantley's big blue eyes were looking up at him again.

"Don't shut yourself up that way! I will introduce you to any girl you care to meet, and Walter will take you anywhere you want to go," she was saying again. Then he laughed softly to himself.

"This business won't do, my boy; you're bad off, b-a-d off, when a pair of blue eyes pop out of the darkness at you and a soft red mouth keeps saying nice things to you." Here he sighed deeply. "Oh, well," he murmured, "I am glad I went, but I need a vacation." Then he snuggled his pillow closer to his head. "Yes, she's a nice girl," he breathed, "the nicest kind of a girl—and I like her."

## CHAPTER IV

### AT CAPTAIN BRANTLEY'S

It was the spring following the coming of Red Shirt to the Traylor plantation. At first he had worked in the field, but Mr. Traylor seemed interested in him from the very beginning. There was something about the great, powerful negro that strangely reminded him of his earliest recollections of Ni-jim, the African king, who had been his father's slave. The quaintness of the negro's speech and his seeming anxiety to please won him favor. He was transferred from field labor and put in charge of the barn and stables, which had, up to that time, been under old Ephraim's care.

It was but a short while after this that a sullenness toward him became apparent among the other negroes. Dilcey, the cook, would not speak to him, and old Ephraim hated him with all the bitterness of his soul for having usurped his place. He planned and plotted for his enemy's downfall.

Only Didema, the house-girl, favored him, but this was because she was always at odds with the other negroes. Silly, but warm-hearted and impulsive, proud of her light color and her physical charms, she deemed herself better than the rest. Shack, the boy

who did general work about the place, openly worshiped her, and, while she held him in secret contempt, still she was kinder to him than to any of the others. Old Ephraim had always pursued a patronizing way toward her, and she now saw her opportunity to gain revenge. She began to defend Red Shirt openly and even carried delicacies from the kitchen of "de big house" to him,—all of which added to Shack's despair and fed the flames of hatred. In her own heart she felt herself far superior to the man whom she was befriending; still, for want of a better subject of contention, she was forced to overlook much of his patent grossness and defend him for contention's sake.

Old Ephraim, white-headed and stooped, wandered disconsolately about the place, until at last he went direct to Mr. Traylor with the story of his undeserved woes.

"You are getting old, Uncle Eph, and the work is too hard for you," said the latter in reply to his complaint. "You have had a long life of usefulness, and we want you to rest and take life easy. Come to me for whatever you want and you shall have it; and there is money put away for you that you can get when you want it. You would never take wages, but I have saved your money for you anyway, and it is yours."

"I doan' want no money," was the bitter reply. "Whut I'm gwineter do wid dese two han's, I lak ter know? Whut I quit mekin' shoes fer when yo' daddie died, an' come here an' tek keer uv dis place fer, ef I'm gwineter be push' outen my nes' by dat black buz-zard when I wuzn't pesterin' nobody? I 'low ol' Mars'

Bill, yo' daddie, Gawd res' his soul in glory, would mighty nigh strop yer fer dat ef he knowed it."

This last was an unfortunate remark, as old Ephraim soon found, for it hardened his master's heart to his purpose.

The negro had a good cabin, plenty to eat, comfortable clothing to wear, and there were many little things that he might have done about the place had he chosen, but he would put his hand to nothing. He wandered about, mumbling to himself. Red Shirt came to him one day and offered to exchange the position which he held, for one by which he might work about the house and yard, if Ephraim would secure it for him. The old negro trembled with rage when the proposition was made to him.

"Swop nothin'!" he shouted; "you er-settin' on my kingdom er-talkin' ter me 'bout swoppin'! Oh, I des wish," he added as he turned away, "I des wish de Lawd had er made mer mouf fer nuffin' but cuss-wu'ds, so ez I cu'd let all de sizzlin' outen mer heart. I'm 'bout ter bus' wid it."

He would take no care of himself and soon contracted a deep and stubborn cough. Virginia tried to make him take some remedy for it.

"No, honey," he said, "ef I is gwineter die, I is des gwineter die, but I ain' gwine tek no physic." The next morning early she heard him on the steps near her room, singing in a low, husky voice:

"When I's dead an' gone ter Glory, doan' yer grieb atter me;  
When I's dead an' gone ter Glory, doan' yer grieb atter me;  
Oh, sister Mary, doan' yer grieb atter me,  
'Kase I doan' want yer ter grieb atter me."



Then followed a long spell of coughing and the tears sprang into her eyes. The singing continued:

"Wid yo' long silber trumpet, doan' yer grieb atter me;  
Wid yo' long silber trumpet, doan' yer grieb atter me;  
Oh, sister Mary, doan' yer grieb atter me,  
'Kase I doan' want yer ter grieb atter me."

The door flew open and she ran impulsively out and dropped down by him on the steps.

"What is the matter, Uncle Eph?" she cried in distress. "Tell me, please, won't you? and I'll help you if I can."

He turned sad accusing eyes upon her. "'Tain't no use now, honey," he said plaintively. "Spec I'm gwineter die putty soon."

He ran his fingers slowly through his beard a few times, fixed his eyes upon a far-sailing cloud and, with a tremor in his voice, continued:

"When yer hear dem bones er rattlin', doan' yer grieb atter me;  
When yer hear dem bones er rattlin', doan' yer grieb atter me;  
Oh, sister Mary—"

Here his voice broke and he bowed his head and began to sob.

"What is the matter, Uncle Eph?" cried the now utterly wretched girl. "What can I do to help you?"

"I wants dat job back," he sobbed weakly.

"You shall have it," she said firmly.

"When?"—raising his head and wiping his eyes on his sleeve.

"To-morrow. I'll simply make father give it to you."

He hopped up from the steps, sniffing and waving

his stick wildly. "Glory ter de Lawd! Glory!" he shouted. Then he suddenly stopped. "An' yer gwine-ter mek dat Red Shirt nigger git clean offen dis place?"

"I'll do that, too, if you won't be satisfied without it."

"I sho won't. Glory! Glory!"

"Hush, Uncle Eph. Don't make so much noise. Everybody will think you are crazy."

"Skuse me, please, ma'am, li'l mistis, fer hollerin' datter way, but I is gwine down ter mer house an' shet de do' an' jump jubilee tel I cain' jump no mo'," and he began to shuffle away.

"Aren't you going to thank me, Uncle Eph?" she asked with a smile.

"Thank yer," he stammered; "thank yer, honey, angel darlin' young mistis—"

She stopped him with a wave of her hand. "Oh, don't talk that way; I don't like it."

"I doan' keer ef yer doan' lak it. Dat's des whut yer is an' yer knows it, an' I'm gwine ter pray de good Gawd dat when I dies an' gits ter Kingdom Come, He gwine ter fix it so ez dey kin be slabs dere an' dis ol' nigger kin be yo' slabe plum' tel—tel"—and he paused, at loss for a word—"tel de jumpin'-off place."

Virginia had her way and Red Shirt was called up the next morning, paid his full month's wages and told that his services were no longer needed. Down at the barn the old negro spied his enemy packing up his few belongings, sullen with anger.

"Dat's right," he ordered triumphantly. "Git yo' rags an' hit de road. Oh, yo' black tucky-buzzard,

yo' sneakin' polecat nigger, yer got yo' money now, so light out f'um here, an' dat quick."

The other negro seized a hay-fork and rushed toward old Ephraim with murder in his eye. The few negroes in the lot stood horror-stricken, expecting to see the old man fall dead before them, but he never moved from his tracks.

"Stick hit in me!" he shouted in defiance. "Stick hit in me, an' evvy white man in dis county'll houn' yer ter hell er ketch yer an' scatter yo' carkis f'um Dan ter Beelzebub; stick hit in me!"

Just before reaching the old darky, Red Shirt stopped and glared at him, quivering with fury.

"My tima come!" he shrieked. "By Gar, me killa you soma-time!"

The two negroes stood facing each other for a moment when, with an oath, Red Shirt hurled the hay-fork from him and, turning, picked up his belongings and went slowly out of the lot. He slammed the gate behind him and took the road toward Granville.

Soon afterward the other negroes heard old Ephraim in the carriage-house, joyously singing:

"Mary weep an' Marthy mourn,  
Yer better let Gawd's chillun erlone  
'Kase Pharaoh's army got drowneded."

Captain Brantley's home was situated between the business portion of the town and the Union Church. The house stood about forty yards from the road, and, unlike the Traylor home, was modern throughout. A broad lawn of Bermuda grass stretched from

the house to the gate, and back of the buildings a tall windmill clanked and groaned as the winds decreed.

Here it was that Red Shirt sought employment and readily found it, and here he was on a bright afternoon in May, busily running a lawn-mower in front of the house.

Mrs. Brantley was sitting on the piazza, doing the double duty of knitting squares for a bed-spread and superintending the negro's work. Now and then she paused to settle her glasses more firmly on her nose, as she peered over the railing and inquired whether he had not skipped a place, usually designating the spot by pointing a needle toward it. Presently Jessica came through the hallway, humming a tune, and walked out to the edge of the piazza. She had brought out a bit of fancy-work, but paused to examine some vines which she had been training to clamber up the wires that were stretched from column to column.

"They are getting along nicely, mother," she said at last.

Mrs. Brantley continued her knitting; she seemed to be in deep thought and made no reply.

"Jessica," she said at last, in a way that caused her daughter to turn quickly toward her.

"What is it, mother?"

"Don't you think that young Mr. Wentworth comes here a little too often?"

Jessica dropped down in her chair with a gasp of astonishment; the color slowly mounted to her face and she turned inquiring eyes upon her mother. Mrs. Brantley continued to knit, never once looking up. The daughter sat for a moment without replying; her

lips moved once or twice, as though to frame an answer, but she hesitated.

"Do you think so, mother?" she finally asked gently.

"I asked you the question," replied Mrs. Brantley.

"I don't know."

"But you should know. Any girl should know."

"But I don't."

There was silence for a little while, and Jessica sat with her elbow on the arm of the chair and her chin in her hand. She was gazing at the movements of a small measuring-worm that was slowly and undecidably making its way up the column in front of her.

"He's coming this afternoon to take me to see Teddie Wilson's mother," she said hesitatingly. "She's still sick, and, just think! that poor boy only gets eight dollars a month for carrying the mail. I have fixed a basket of nice things for her and I know she will enjoy them."

"It's all right about Mrs. Wilson, but you have your own phaeton and there are plenty of negroes to hitch the horse," observed Mrs. Brantley, now looking up for the first time.

Jessica studied the worm more critically.

"It's funny about these worms, isn't it?" she ventured.

"Yes, it's funny about a good many things; but it's not funny about the way people will say you are running after this Mr. Wentworth."

Jessica flushed hotly.

"I'm not," she said with emphasis.

"I don't say that you are, but others will say it."

Jessica looked toward her mother with misery in her eyes.

"What am I to do?" she cried. "He goes with our set. Father invited him here and he does not like Virginia, and she simply can't stand him, and—and—I just go with him because he asks me to. He heard me tell Teddie that I would go to see his mother and he asked if he might not take me over in his buggy, since he is coming to town anyway. He doesn't come here much oftener than Walter does, or Doctor Mitchell, or—or several of the young men."

Mrs. Brantley continued to knit calmly, and the clicking of the needles made Jessica fidget.

"Do you object to him?" asked the daughter.

"No,"—slowly,—"I can't say that I do. In fact, I rather like him and think he is a very nice man, but—" and the needles again clicked in a most vexing manner.

"But what?"

"Oh, I suppose we had better drop the subject, since you don't seem able to understand me," said her mother.

"But I don't want to drop it. I want to find out what you want me to do, and if you don't want him to come at all, I can be mean and hateful, and he'll be glad enough to stay away."

"Now, Jessie," said her mother reproachfully, "don't talk that way."

The sound of an approaching vehicle was heard, and Martin whirled up to the gate, hitched his horse and came up the walk.

Mrs. Brantley had touched Jessica's bump of rebel-

lion, and all because she had given no reason for the exceedingly pointed questions she had asked. As Martin approached them with an easy stride and lifted his hat, with a word of greeting to them both, Jessica's eyes ran quickly over him from his feet to the top of his head. She noted the tall, supple form, the broad shoulders, the graceful air and the strong, almost handsome face, and she could see no earthly reason for her mother's questioning or why he shouldn't come as often as he wished.

They were soon in the buggy and then he noticed for the first time that her eyes had a snap and sparkle to them he had never seen before, and that her ears were pink almost to redness.

"Some one has been talking about you," he said, smiling. "Your ears burn."

"Talking to me, rather," she replied.

"What about? if I may ask."

"A man."

"Oh ho! And did my lady not want to talk about that man?"

"No! I wanted to talk about a worm I saw; it interested me more."

"Poor man!" he said with a mock sigh. She made no reply.

"Since you mentioned it, now, who was that man?"

"There's a horse-fly; knock it off; it is stinging the horse."

He flicked it lightly with his whip.

"What about the man?"

"Let's talk horse-flies."

"No! Let's talk about that man."

"Why don't you like Virginia?" she cried, turning on him suddenly. "I wish you two people would stop being so silly. You make it awfully hard for the rest of us, and there isn't a reason on earth why you should not be the best of friends. You have done nothing to her and she has done nothing to you. She is just the finest girl in the world, I think, and I get awfully vexed with you both, sometimes, for the way you act!"

He sat for a moment silent; the wheels whirled through the sand with a hissing sound. She looked up at him and his face was stern and even a bit sad, she thought. Then he turned toward her with a smile and all the hardness in his face had slipped away.

"Let's talk horse-flies," he whispered.



## CHAPTER V

AARON GREEN

Red Shirt continued to work at Captain Brantley's. At first he kept to himself and rebuffed the advances made by some of the other negroes. He passed his evenings alone, sitting on his doorstep in the dark and smoking cigarette after cigarette. He was thinking and planning.

Then, after a bit, a change seemed to come over him and he began to be more friendly with the negroes in the neighborhood. Granville had no saloons, but whisky was to be had. Red Shirt procured a jug of it, and one night he invited some of the negroes to his room in the servants' quarters and they all drank freely.

"Me an' you be de good frien' all time, ain't it?" he asked of them in his most winning manner. "Putty soon me go an' tek ship an' go long time an' mebbe so when come back bimeby sometime, me an' you be de putty good frien'."

They paid but little attention to his talk, but one day, soon after this, he told Captain Brantley he wanted to go.

"Me lak piney woods putty good, but me wanter go tek ship," he said. "No lak stay all time here; lak go sometime on de big sea an' feel putty good."

The following morning he left. When old Ephraim heard the news he was much pleased.

"Glad uv it, glad uv it!" he remarked. "Hope ter Gawd dat nigger'll neber track de roads in dis county no mo'. I wuz raly s'prised at mer white folks pickin' up er tramp nigger datter way, anyhow."

From the house Red Shirt made his way to Anderson and Tiffin's store with a croker-sack swung across his shoulder. There he found Martin Wentworth, Walter Tiffin and young Doctor Lloyd Mitchell, who had met by appointment for the purpose of arranging a fish-fry down at Palmetto Springs, a pretty spot by the river, some four miles below the town.

The negro placed his croker-sack on the floor and, taking out some money, bought a quantity of supplies such as one who desires to camp out for some weeks might purchase.

He was not in a particularly pleasant mood that morning, for he had had a war of words with Mandy, the old and rather garrulous negress, who had been cook at the Brantleys' for many years. He had been worsted in the encounter, for Mandy possessed an exceedingly sharp tongue and had unbosomed herself of an accumulated store of dislike in a torrent of backyard taunt and repartee that had made Red Shirt seethe with speechless anger. This, too, on the very day when he had hoped to depart, bearing with him the good will of every one. It was a little too much, and, though the heat of his anger had passed, an ill humor still clung to him and he looked sullen and vicious. Bob, the porter, waited on him, and he then

turned and walked out of the door with the croker-sack in his hand.

At the edge of the platform, in front of the store, a stoop-shouldered, shabbily-dressed white man was sitting, staring at the ground. He had the pale and emotionless face of the dweller in the pine barrens and gallberry flats of the neighboring country. A scanty blond beard grew on his face, and he had the typical dull blue eyes that one must sometimes regard twice to know whether they reflect an inward barrenness of thought or express an overpowering sadness. In the man's face and whole bearing there was that shrinking and ever-present air of apology and self-effacement that stirs in other men a mingled feeling of pity, resentment and contempt. He was known as Slim Simpson, and lived with his son Josh in an ill-preserved house about a mile east of the town. He was believed to be a moonshiner, but, on account of the number of powerful and exceedingly vicious dogs which he allowed to run loose about the place, no one was able to pass within the outer gate; and the suspicion had not, for the general public at least, been established as fact. A yellow mongrel, more hound than anything else, was his constant companion, and this animal in many ways resembled its master. It was utterly cowardly and had the 'air of a sneak. Its general appearance and demeanor had gained for it the name Slink, and it now lay at its master's feet in an attitude befitting its name.

Red Shirt paused for a moment on the platform and stood gazing at the pair; then, walking deliberately forward, he stepped from the platform down on the

dog's tail. The animal rose with a yelp of pain and, turning, the negro kicked it in the side so that it tumbled over and over and then lay on its back howling with pain and fear.

In an instant the white man sprang to his feet; his eyes blazed with anger and he drew out a huge clasp-knife, opened it and advanced on the negro. Red Shirt started back in surprise, for he had expected nothing of the kind and was caught entirely off his guard. The white man might have plunged the knife in the negro's side, but instead of this he paused suddenly, his face went white and he began to shake as with an ague; then he turned, and, putting the knife back in his pocket with a trembling hand, strode slowly away, quivering in every limb. Red Shirt stared after him in amazement and contempt. Walter Tiffin, Martin Wentworth and Doctor Mitchell had all three hurried to the doorway at the first sound of the disturbance, and now stood watching the strange spectacle.

Suddenly the negro dropped his bundle and stick and, picking up a piece of brick, hurled it at Simpson's back with a taunting cry:

"Run, you white trash!"

With a choking exclamation, Walter Tiffin snatched an ax helve from a case that stood on the platform, sprang to the ground and made for the negro, his teeth set and his eyes flashing in anger. Red Shirt caught up his stick by the smaller end, but before he could steady himself, Walter struck him with the ax helve and knocked him sprawling to the ground. He fell across his croker-sack and, with a howl of rage, thrust his

hand into the opening to draw out some weapon; but at that instant he heard a call that made him pause.

"Yer tek yo' han' outen dat sack er I'll mek hawg meat outen you in two secon's."

He raised his eyes in the direction of the voice and gazed into the muzzle of a double-barreled shot-gun pointed toward his body. It had been thrust out of the side window of the store, and the eyes of Bob, the porter, glinted down the barrel. Red Shirt withdrew his hand from the sack, but he was trembling with rage.

"Le'me settle dis business, please sir, Mars' Walter!" came the voice of Bob from the window. Tiffin turned, still white with anger and strode back to the store.

"Run him out of town!" he ordered.

Bob sprang out of the side window, the shot-gun in one hand and a buggy whip in the other.

"You de nigger whut war gwineter run dis town, wuz yer?" he cried. "You de black ape whut war retchin' fer er onderhan' shot outen er sack at Mars' Walter, um-umph! I show yer er few monkey-shines, yer pizen-faced hop-outen-er-box! You back off f'um dat sack now an' den I'll cut some stripes on yer lak er rattan vine had growed roun' yer laigs."

Red Shirt rose to his feet, his face quivering and his eyes gleaming hatred and defiance, but he made no move to retreat.

Martin started forward and touched Walter on the arm.

"Don't let Bob whip him!" he cried. "You've hurt him enough already."

Walter turned on him fiercely.

"What! Let a nigger treat a white man as he did Slim Simpson, when the man wasn't bothering him at all? No, sir, I won't stand for it! I don't care how sorry and no-'count Slim is, he's human at least, and nobody but a dirty brute would do what that nigger did."

"Anyway, don't let him whip him. Let the man go!"

Walter hesitated for a moment and then shrugged his shoulders.

"Back him off and see what he was trying to pull out of that sack!" he called to Bob. The negro raised the gun and Red Shirt stepped back a few paces and watched the other stoop and take a big revolver of the bulldog type from the sack.

"Take the cartridges out and let him go!" said Walter.

This the negro did, putting the weapon back in the sack. He then returned to the store, leaving Red Shirt standing in the road. He remained thus for a moment and then stepped forward and gathered up the sack and stick while the white men looked on, wondering what he would then do. Bob turned and stood fingering the shot-gun fondly. Suddenly Red Shirt faced them and took off his hat.

"Gennermens, I wuz wrong," he said; "I 'pologize."

Then he strode away and, after going about a hundred yards, sat down on a horse-block in front of a gate and, placing his bundle on the ground, buried his face in his hands and swore strange and bitter oaths.

"You see, I was right," said Martin with a laugh as

the three reëntered the store. "The lesson has had its effect already, for he has apologized, and, besides that, I think he is really sorry."

"You had better go and give him a piece of pie now to complete the job," said Walter. "That nigger would kill you for fifty cents. I know his stripe."

After a while Red Shirt rose, glared for a moment back toward the store and then, taking up his bundle, walked slowly away. He strode moodily down the long hill toward the river, and when he had reached the sandy stretch at the foot, his eye fastened upon some one ahead of him and the scowl again slipped over his face. A tall negro in a clerical garb was standing on the bridge, gazing down on the waters and watching the play of the morning sunlight on the ripples and eddies of the stream. It was Aaron Green, who preached at the negro Methodist church in Granville and also at some other negro churches in the eastern end of the county. This man was, to the white people of Granville, a strange character. He had straight black hair and intense black eyes, and his features were rather those of the Caucasian or Semitic races than of the Ethiopian; but in color he was what might be called a bronze brown. He was well educated and his oratory had made him almost an object of worship among the members of his congregation. He had drifted into the town some two years before and, after preaching for the negroes, had gained a power over them held by no one else. He had no wife and lived in a tidily-kept little house, which he rented from Captain Brantley.

Red Shirt gazed at him for a moment and then,

with a smile on his face, continued on his way. Just as his foot struck the bridge, the preacher straightened up and turned his eyes upon the disturber of his dreams.

"Howdy, pahson!" said Red Shirt by way of greeting. "Fine day, ain't it?"

The preacher leaned back against the railing of the bridge and gazed from head to foot at the negro who stood before him.

"Where are you going?" he asked finally.

"Who? Me?"

"Yes, you."

Red Shirt shot a glance of suspicion at his interrogator and then shifted his weight slowly from one foot to the other.

"I'm gwine ter de Gulf an' tek ship."

A sneer came to the preacher's lips.

"And what then?" he asked.

"An' whut den?"

"Yes, and what then."

"Sail on de sea."

"And what then?"

Red Shirt gazed at the preacher with wide eyes, and his anger began to show plainly on his face. By an effort he controlled himself.

"Sail some mo', by Gar!" he said gruffly.

"What are you doing here in Granville, anyway?" queried Green. "What is your purpose? What do you want?"

Red Shirt put his bundle down and walked up to the preacher with an oath.

"You sma-a-a-h-t!" he hissed. "You preach lot fool



nigger. You be putty dead, by Gar, you gib me de big talk."

The searching eyes of the preacher seemed to play upon and bare his very soul, but it was only because of the guilt that was in his heart. No fear touched him, for with animal courage no one was better supplied; it was simply rage that stirred him. He fastened his eyes on those of the preacher and, with quivering face, advanced until they stood within a foot of each other. The preacher turned his eyes away and smiled sadly. A kingfisher that had been sitting on a snag some distance up the river suddenly made a dip down to the bosom of the glistening stream and then, circling across, came flying toward them and passed under the bridge with a shuttling cry. The preacher waved Red Shirt from him.

"Stand back, my friend," he said gently. "I mean you no harm."

Red Shirt stepped slowly back and regarded him doubtfully.

"Listen," said the preacher, and his manner became eager and earnest. "I know who you are, and I do not intend to bother you in any way. I want to be your friend and to help you, and I want you to be my friend. I studied you as a curiosity from the first day you came to this town. I learned of the things you inquired about; I have seen your face light up with memories when you did not know I was watching. Jim, son of Ni-jim the African, grandson of Ephraim the shoemaker, I know you. Where you have been and what your life has been, I do not know and I do not ask. I may never know. But there is a

bond between us that should tie us together as friends, and if, by fair means, I can help you to your own, I will do it gladly."

Red Shirt stared at him a moment and then, glancing quickly up and down the road, caught his stick by the little end and held it in position to strike.

"By Gar!" he cried, "you know too much."

"Wait," said the preacher. "Wait until I have finished."

Red Shirt stood silent, hardly knowing what to do.

"You hate the white man, do you not?" asked Aaron Green in a low voice, his arms folded before him.

Red Shirt stood for a moment silent and then, turning suddenly, he shook his stick with a gesture of hatred toward the village hidden among the trees back on the hill.

"Hate um," he muttered between his teeth, "hate um all."

Then it seemed to dawn on him that he was being drawn out by the preacher, and he turned on him fiercely again.

"Why for you ask da' question?" he asked.

"Because," said the preacher, and his eyes glowed with suppressed fire, "because *I* hate them all." He passed his hand over his eyes and then walked up and down the bridge, filled with a nervous energy.

"Each night," he cried, "it comes back to me. I have tried—God only knows how I have tried—to forget it and let it sleep, but it comes, it comes always. At night when I kneel to pray it comes to me while my lips are repeating the very words of the prayer, and I can not drive it away." He turned on Red Shirt

with a cry almost of agony. "My grandfather was an Indian," he said. "My grandmother was a black woman and a slave. My father was a Creole, and I am—what? A nigger! There are whip marks on my back, there are bullet wounds on my body, and I have been hanged. Do you hear that? Hanged!"—and his voice sank to a husky whisper. Tears came into his eyes, and he pointed his finger toward the sky.

"God knows I have tried," he continued bitterly, "and he knows, too, that I have failed. I know you, Jim, son of Ni-jim the African, and I tell you I am your friend."

He held out his hand and Red Shirt took it wonderingly.

"Black man," said the preacher, "the upward paths are not mine. I may struggle to them again, but I know that I shall fall, and somehow my soul tells me that you and I are to be bound together by the strongest of ties. You are coming back, I know, and when you do return, come to me if I have not gone away, and I will truly be your friend."

Red Shirt stood in deep meditation for some moments, and then his face brightened and he raised his eyes to those of the preacher.

"You swear?" he asked.

"Yes, I swear."

"How you swear?"

"By the whip marks on my back and the bullet wounds on my breast. By the graves of dead slaves and the sweat of living ones."

A gleam of satisfaction shone on Red Shirt's face, and he answered in a low tone:

"You do putty good. Mebbe so see you when come back."

He shook the preacher's hand and turned away, but paused suddenly, for an idea had come to him. He drew his pistol from the croker-sack where it lay among his recent purchases, showed it to the preacher, and told him of his recent encounter.

"And you want cartridges for it?" asked Aaron Green.

"Yare, mus' hab de cattridge."

The preacher examined the weapon for a moment, holding it in his hand; then he wrapped his handkerchief about it.

"All right," he said. "You go on across the bridge and I will get the cartridges." Then he turned and walked slowly up the long hill to the town.

In a few minutes, having made his purchases, the preacher returned and delivered the weapon and the cartridges to Red Shirt. The men bade each other good-by and Red Shirt continued on his way.

When he had gone about eighteen miles, he came to a dense swamp some four miles wide, following the flow of a small creek which ran across the road in a southwesterly direction to join the river. He stood for a few moments on the bridge, and, after gazing up and down the road without seeing any one, plunged into the thick growth and followed the winding course of the stream. A cattle-path threaded its way through ivy, cane and alders and underneath giant trees, and along this he took his way, silent and thoughtful.

He passed at last over a great pile of windfalls, paus-

ing a moment on the top of the heap to listen to the army of tiny wood sawyers that were rasping busily away. Leaving this, he came soon to a place where the path again skirted the creek for some distance. Not a leaf was stirring, and he walked silently along past clumps of palmetto, past gardens of ferns and rank-grown scarlet flowers, where no underbrush grew and the branches of the great trees twined thick and dark far overhead. The woods were almost without sound save for the occasional distant piping of some shy swamp bird or the splash of a hungry fish as it pursued a darting minnow that was making a wild flight for safety. Occasional patches of sunlight goldened the banks of moss and further accentuated the dimness of the caverns of shadow that stretched from thicket to thicket where underbrush grew.

The soil was black and moist, and now and again, from some dark, shaded spot, a low scarlet bloom caught the eye like a dash of flame.

Steadily he continued on his way, journeying between west and southwest until late in the afternoon, when he came to a place where the creek forked, forming an island several acres in extent, whose banks were higher than the surrounding swamp land,—indeed, almost perpendicular. He noticed that cane grew thickly upon the island, showing that cattle were unable to reach it. He waded across the creek at a shallow place and, clambering up the bank by swinging on a low-hanging huckleberry bush, began to work his way through the tangle. Finally, near the center of the island, he found an open space and, taking a hatchet from the croker-sack, set to work to fashion

a shack where he might stay and be protected from the weather. When he had completed it, he spread a piece of oil-cloth over the top and, after eating his supper, lay down to rest and to perfect his plans.

A week later the mail coming from Pendleton to Granville was robbed and about fourteen hundred dollars stolen. Little Teddie Wilson's body was found under a pile of brush with a great hole blown in the side of his head. The murderer escaped by mounting a stick of timber that was passing down White's timber ditch and left no trace behind.

That night, when the news came in, Aaron Green sat for a long while in his doorway staring out into the darkness. Dim lights shone here and there in the town, and from time to time he heard the confused murmur of voices. His lips quivered and the tears gathered in his eyes, as he murmured in a low tone:

*"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger."*

Then he arose and cried aloud in a bitter voice: "It is stronger than I; it is stronger than I."

## CHAPTER VI

WALTER TIFFIN

The summer days dragged slowly by. In the evening, when his work was done, Martin frequently went out to the Traylor plantation, ostensibly for the purpose of discussing the purchase, by his company, of certain timber lands owned by Mr. Traylor. More frequently, however, he might have been found with Jessica Brantley.

There had been no general gathering of the young people since the day when they had a picnic at Palmetto Springs. That outing had been arranged by Jessica for the purpose of throwing Martin and Virginia in each other's society and bringing them to terms of friendship or to an open rupture. In this she had been ably assisted by other members of the party, but the plan had, as far as she was concerned, succeeded all too well; for when, late in the afternoon, Virginia was talking with Martin just before he should leave her to start on the homeward drive, she turned and gazed into Jessica's eyes, and what she saw there was fear, simple and undisguised.

Neither Martin nor Walter saw anything of this, and both were more than glad that the senseless coldness between Martin and Virginia had passed away. It had been a source of annoyance to all, for the feel-

ing had long since passed the simple stage of indifference to that of avoidance and dislike, and was verging very nearly into an openly-expressed hatred.

Walter had loved Jessica almost from childhood, and was, for a while at least, more than pleased with the new arrangement. For almost a year he had been obliged to submit to some plan whereby Martin and Virginia might attend the same gathering and yet be able to have as little to do with or to say to each other as they might choose. This usually meant that he was to allow Martin to accompany Jessica, and, though he never complained, still he felt that the foolish stubbornness of his two friends was working him an injustice. Had the little circle been larger, it might have been more easily arranged, but, much as he liked Virginia, and entertaining as he had formerly believed Clara Winwood to be, he still sometimes thought and felt that it would be good indeed to be able to go with sweet-faced, sunny-hearted Jessica again as often as he had in days gone by.

Early in September, he received a letter from a firm in Mobile tendering him an excellent position and one that offered every opportunity for advancement. A member of the firm had come to Granville on business on several occasions, and the duty of arranging the dealings between Anderson and Tiffin and that firm had usually fallen to Walter.

This was the opportunity he had long wished for. There could, if he worked hard, be no obstacle to his rapid advancement—he understood this from the beginning. His little capital could be increased, and he might, indeed, some day become a member of the firm,



Such were his dreams as he pondered over the matter. And through it all, through every hope and every ambition, Jessica's face beckoned him on, and his great love for her spurred his dreams until his cheeks flushed and his eyes glowed with confidence in and exultation over the reality of things that yet might be.

After a few moments this passed, and his brow became clouded and his eyes troubled. For some weeks past he had found a change in Jessica. Her mind frequently seemed preoccupied, and yet the light-hearted ways still came from time to time to ease his fancy down to the sluggish sweetness of contentment. There was, however, a something that he could not understand, an impenetrable telepathic shield that was unconsciously lowered or raised by her with perplexing uncertainty, leaving him to wander for a moment in a sunny corner of the garden of her thoughts and graces, to find himself an instant later a beggar at the gate of a walled-in mystery, knowing not when nor where nor how he might ever enter.

That afternoon he went driving with her and, as they rode slowly along a shady road through a beautiful wood, whatever there had been of trouble or sorrow in her face and manner passed away, and he found in her the reality or, mayhap, the reflection of days gone by. It seemed to him, at last, as he was telling her of the offer he had received and saw in her face an undisguised look of genuine sorrow, that the psychological moment had come; and then it was he told the story of his love in a gentle yet earnest way.

Jessica listened in silence, never once turning her

face to him. There was a quivering of her lip, a tear stole down and paused upon her cheek, and then faster and faster the tears came, until at last she buried her face in her hands and wept bitterly.

She realized it all now, and in her heart there was a passionate storm of grief, mingled with a sullen rumbling of self-reproach, that grew in intensity as the moments passed. There was no one to blame for it but herself, and, had it not been for this other, the man who had come from the North, and who, she felt, cared nothing for her, the old dreams that had seemed fair, indeed, in days gone by would now be realized. She felt a contempt for herself, and her self-accusations were sharp and merciless; but still there clung the vestige of a hope beside which no man's hurt or no man's sorrow could have weight.

Then she raised her head and falteringly told him that it might never be. There was a note of grief in her voice at the pain she knew she was giving, but this gradually changed until there grew a harshness in her tone that he had never before heard. A bitterness was creeping slowly in, and it voiced at last a rebellion that he could not understand,—an hysterical rebellion it was, against him, against the world, against life, against everything. It culminated in another flood of tears.

“Oh, why couldn't it be as it was?” she cried. “Why did you? Why did you?”

Hurt beyond expression, he sat in stony silence and stared ahead with unseeing eyes as he drove slowly along the beautiful country road. He turned back toward the little town, and when at dusk he left her at

her gate he went to his room over the store and sat in his arm-chair, gazing into the gathering darkness that thickened against the whiteness of the ceiling.

Finally he rose and, lighting his lamp, sat down to write a letter to Mobile declining the position that had been offered him. What was there to be gained by going? he argued. What mattered success in anything without her love? He bowed his head on his arms with a weary sigh, but soon he rose and began to walk nervously up and down the floor. He found in this a measure of relief from his mental pain, and so grimly and silently he fought the battle out. He would stay a while longer, at all events, and would win her in the end.

Taking the letter down stairs, he mailed it in the post-office department of the store, and then, with his hands in his pockets and his head bowed, he walked slowly along the single street of the little town until he came to her gate. There he found Martin's mare fastened at the hitching-post and from the house came the sound of her voice; she was singing for him. He stood and listened for a moment to the careless, happy song, and a flood of resentment came over him.

"Oh, Jessie, little girl, how can you!" he murmured. "How can you have the heart to sing that way, now?"

He strode slowly on up the street, his heart filled with bitterness. After a while he turned and, crossing over, came down the other side. Once more he paused and listened, and her voice came to him clear and sweet. She was singing the refrain of *Primrose Farm*:

"For hearts must love, but some must wait,  
And some will find their love too late,"

The words of the song fell heavily upon his heart, and he turned away, bowed with dumb, lonely grief.

The next evening he walked up the little street again, but the parlor was dark and the house was wrapped in gloom and silence. It was the same on the second evening, and on the following day he wrote a note asking if he might call. A reply came to the effect that she was ill and could not see him.

That evening, as he sat in his room gazing at the unread pages of a book, he heard some one toiling heavily up the stairs. At last there came a knock at the door and, when he opened it, old Mandy, the Brantleys' cook, stood before him, puffing and blowing and rolling her eyes nervously.

"Well, Aunt Mandy, what do you want?" he asked in some surprise.

"Law, honey," she replied mysteriously, "whut I is got ter say, got ter be said wid de do' shet." And she stepped into the room without more ado. He smiled wanly and closed the door.

"Kin I set down, Mister Walter?" she asked. "I is plum' blowed f'um clambin' dem steps: I ain't clumb dat high in er mont' er Sundays."

He placed a chair for her and the old negress dropped into it. She adjusted her head-rag, settled herself in the chair by a twist, and then began.

"Mister Walter," she said solemnly, "dis here business whut I is gwineter talk 'bout is gotter be grave-yard talk. Ef dey wuz ter know at de house 'bout dis here howdy-do, I spec de cap'n 'ud skin me erlive. I knows dat ef I wuz er man he'd shoot me, an' I ain't so certain lak hit stan's but whut he'd git so

awful mad dat he'd put out mer pipe wid er stick er stove-wood biff' he stop ter 'sidder. De cap'n sho is er mighty good white man, but when he git mad, dey ain't nobody kin mek him stop ter 'sidder. I knows dat, 'kase I is heerd argymints wid him 'bout dat, an' he allus sez: 'Damn de 'sidder.' Dat's how come I sez whut I does, 'kase dis here is sho danjus business."

"What on earth are you talking about?" he exclaimed.

"Yer ain't gwineter gib me erway, is yer?" she asked.

"Certainly not. What is it?"

"Dey is er worl' er san' bein' raise' at de house. Whew! Hit sho would do yer heart good ter hear some uv it."

"What are you trying to tell me, anyway? I don't want to know what is going on at the house."

"Yas, yer does," she replied. "Yas, yer does. Yer cain' fool dis ol' nigger. I is knowed yer eber since yer wuz knee-high ter er puddle-duck, an' I is got sump'n ter tell yer whut yer needs ter know. I useter lak yer ma. Dat sho wuz er good lady, an' she wuz allus mighty good ter me, an' I is allus tuk er sorter int'rust in yer fer dat reason."

"Look here, Aunt Mandy," he said, "I appreciate all that, but if you have got family secrets of the Brantleys' that you intend to tell me, why, I don't want to hear them and won't listen to them. I am much obliged to you, but you might just as well go back."

"Hit ain't dey secret," she replied, "hit's yourn."

"Well, what is it then?"

"Yer ain't gwineter git mad, is yer?" she asked.

"No," he replied with a smile. "I'll try not to, anyway."

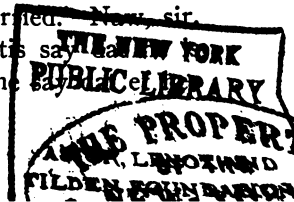
"Wall," she said slowly, "I knows de whole business. Us ain't gwineter tetch on dat, but my baby's ma is er been gibin' her hallyloojer-happy-lan' f'um who laid de rail. Yas, suh, she is scotch de po' chil' so dat I des up an' tol' her dat she hatter quit it. An' whut do de honey chil' 'spon' back? Noffin'. She ain't said nairy wu'd outen her mouf. Des one time she is spoke, an' dat sho wuz er Joe-darter. De Mistis is done fish outen de chil' 'bout you two, an' den she say dat de angel am er disgrace, an' she cry an' carry on, an' de cap'n he des snort, he so mad. Dat Yankee man is got dat chil' hoo-dooed, but whut I wants ter say is dat de ol' folks is wid yer, heart an' han'."

"That will do, Mandy; I don't want to hear any more," he said, rising.

"Yas," she said, still sitting calmly in her chair as if sure of her ground, "yer ain't let me git ter de p'int. Wait tel I gits ter dat, an' den rise up an' see whut yer say."

He stood leaning on the back of his chair, and his face was white and wan.

"Yer got ter tek de hoo-doo offen dat chil'," she said. "I ain't er gwineter let no strange man come an' hoo-doo dat chil' widout seein' de hoo-doo git hisse'f in er passle er trubble. Dat man is er been er-comin' fer er long time. He des set an' talk an' talk an' th'ow er spell roun' dat chil', but he ain't say nairy time: 'Come on, honey, an' let's us git married. Now, sir, he ain't said it nairy time. De mistis say she say gott'er be froze, an' de honey chil' she say



folks ain't got no better manners 'n ter freeze er gemman, she gwineter gether up her doll-rags an' hit de grit. Dat's whut she sho done said, an' den she hush. Dat done de business, an' de ol' folks dey is quit talkin', but she is done pack her trunk an' des stay in her room mos' all de time. De cap'n he went ter Pendleton yistiddy, an' sen' er tellygraft ter Richmon' ter his sister fer ter sen' dat chil' er invite fer ter mek her er visit. She gwineter bite at dat sho, 'kase she doan' know nothin' 't all 'bout dat tellygraft, an' she plumb stuck on Richmon'.

"Dem's de 'rangemints, but what I sez is, Whar does you come in? Whar do Mister Walter figger out in dis business? sez I. Dat Yankee man am er snake in de grass, but de cap'n say not. De cap'n say dat he am er nice man, but he done got tired dis business. He say dat hit gittin' ser'us on one side an' de yother side des out fer er frolic. I heerd him an' de mistis er-talkin' 'bout hit, an' dat's how come I know. Now whut yer gotter do is dis here: yer gotter git sump'n er 'nother an' bust up dat hoo-doo, 'kase dey gwineter keep dat chil' up in Richmon' slap tel de cows comes home. Dat man he des keep er-comin' an' de cap'n he des ez perlite ez yer please, but yer sho got ter hustle ef yer gwineter haid off dat trip, 'kase when dat chil' done gone, she sho is done gone. De cap'n an' de mistis is fixin' de 'rangemints so ez dey gwineter go nex' summer to Ferginia ter de springs, an' atter dat de baby done had sech er good time gwine ter balls an' sech lak dat dey hopin' she gwineter stay nex' winter atter dissen, an' ef she ain't gwineter wanter do dat, den de cap'n gwineter sen' her ter New York ter study playin' de pianny. He

say he gwineter kuoh dat business, 'kase hit gittin' ter be er shame.

"Now whut I sez is dis here. You git you er big stick an' run dat man outen de country. He ain't done dat chil' right. Ef he had de raisin' uv er gemman, he orter got sense ernuff ter know dat er good-lookin' man lak him ain't got no business er-hangin' roun' all de time widout he got 'tentions. I is er gwineter hate ter lose de chil', I sho is, an' I been er-cryin' tel I is mos' blin', but I done 'sidder de business, an' so I come ter see ef dey ain't some way dat you kin bust up de hoo-doo an' run dat man outen de country. He gwine ter de Traylors' runnin' dat bery same game. I ketch Didema in town yistiddy, an' I done pump her ez dry ez er doodle-hole. Yer mout sorter tek her er-fishin' an' let her drap in de creek an' den haul her out an' mek er reskew, er sump'n lak dat. She de fines' gal in the worl', but she mighty 'flammatory, an' I spec dat 'ud fetch her all right. Ef dey ain't sump'n done, I been studying 'bout settin' fire ter dat mill-house, but—"

Here Walter raised his hand. "That will do," he said. "You are an old fool, Mandy. You go on back to the house and don't you ever dare breathe any more of that stuff to me. I let you talk just to see how far you would go, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

She arose to her feet with a snort of anger.

"I'll git out," she said. "I sho will git out. I wuz er-tryin' fer ter sabe yer soul, but you kin paddle yer own kinnoo f'um dis time on."

Walter opened the door and she flounced out and went marching down the stairs, making them creak at



every step. He sat down again to try to read his book. After he had run over a few pages he turned back and found that he had read nothing, so he flung the book into a corner and, blowing out the light, went to bed in the darkness.

"The old fool!" he muttered again between his teeth. "She has upset me. Jess don't care anything about him, for she told me so, and, God bless her heart! she never told a lie in her life."

Several days passed by without his seeing Jessica, so one evening he drove out to call on Virginia. She, seeing the trouble and desperation in his face, begged him to tell her the cause of it all, promising to help him. For a while he tried to laugh it off, but at last, finding her persistent, his better judgment gave way, and he told her without reserve of his great love for Jessica, and asked that she speak to her for him. He told her of the offer that he had had, and what his love meant to him, but never once did he mention Martin's name. They were sitting on the porch in the starlight, and when he had finished she gazed in silence out into the night. The old scene at Palmetto Springs came back to her, and she saw again the look in Jessica's eyes, and now, clearer than ever before, did she understand it all.

She had never dreamed that it lay in the merry-eyed, light-hearted girl; but the drawn look in the round face and the fear that lay in the eyes,—a fear that was mingled with defiance and almost hatred,—had been caught by her in a flash and would remain with her for a long time. She had been shocked, startled and hurt by the look, and in her own heart

something had risen and fought back for an instant through her eyes; but not until she had quietly given her friend a reassuring caress did the look die out of Jessica's eyes or the pallor leave her face.

Virginia sat thinking. Once there was a flush upon her face, and again it grew pale. Walter gazed at her for a moment, and then laughed bitterly.

"That was an elegant thing for me to do, wasn't it?" he said mockingly. "It was the act of a fool who exhibits his heart-beats and cries to his friend to come and watch him drink his cup of bitterness."

"No! no!" she cried brokenly. "Don't say that, Walter. Don't even think it. You—you hurt me."

He turned from her and snapped his fingers as he walked nervously up and down.

"Come!" she cried. "Come and sit down by me. I want to talk to you." He dropped wearily down on the settee beside her.

"You can't do me any good that way," he said, shaking his head. "I know, I know; talk to her. Take her love for you and your love for her and twine me in it, somehow, so that she will love me—if not to-day, then some other day. Talk to her for me, will you not?" he pleaded.

Again Virginia was silent. She had begged him to tell her his trouble, promising to help him, and she knew, too, in her heart, that he would never have breathed it to another soul. She looked at him beseechingly.

"Don't ask me that!" she cried. "I can not do it, Walter. Anything else on earth, but I can not talk to her for you."

He turned toward her in amazement.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Because—because," she said. Then she was silent for a moment, and when she spoke again there was a hard note in her voice. "I can not explain to you, even though you should hate me for it. She would not—understand."

A flush had crept into her cheeks, but he could not see it in the dim starlight.

"I don't see why not," he cried. "You have been my friend from childhood, as well as hers, and surely it would be the most friendly office you could perform. I want to find out why she will not and can not care for me. She says there is no one else."

Virginia shook her head.

"Yes," she replied; "but I can not explain to you and so you will not understand me. I can not, Walter, so please, *please* do not put this upon me. I know you will misjudge me and deem me but a poor, worthless, make-believe friend, but I have to let you believe even that,—for I can not."

He rose and looked at her reproachfully for some moments.

"Ah, Virginia! Virginia!" he said. "You have failed me."

He was silent for a moment, and then shrugged his shoulders. "Well," he said with a sigh, "I suppose I did ask too much of you. It is something that I should be able to do for myself, and if I fail, why, I deserve to lose, only—only—" He closed his lips tightly and turned his eyes toward the deep starlit gloom of the sky.

"Oh, Walter!" she cried. "If you only knew my heart, you wouldn't, you couldn't reproach me."

He turned quickly and, coming back to her, said softly:

"Forgive me, Virginia! Please forgive me! I—I don't think I am quite myself to-night."

"Forgive me, rather, for failing you," she said in a broken voice.

He stooped and, catching her hands, kissed them reverently.

"Good night, Virginia! God bless you!" he murmured in a husky tone. Then he straightened up and, walking to the steps, paused for a moment and gazed again at the sky. Slowly and softly he descended to the sandy walk, and soon she heard him driving rapidly toward Granville.

## CHAPTER VII

### DILCEY AND UNCLE EPHRAIM

"Does yer know," remarked old Ephraim to Dilcey, the cook, as he sat one evening in the yard before her door, puffing contentedly away at his clay pipe, "does yer know dat dat Yankee mill man is er-gittin' er mighty heap er business ter talk ter Mars' Willum 'bouten lately?"

"I hadn' notice' hit special," she replied, seeking to draw him out.

"Yas, ma'am," he continued. "Dey is er-talkin' 'bouten dat timber lan' up de ribber wid all de monst'us pines on it. De comp'ny talkin' 'bout buyin' hit up."

"Is dat so?" she exclaimed. "Wonder whut de white folks wants ter sell it fer?"

"I reckon hit gwineter fetch er putty good price," he said.

"I reckon hit am," she remarked, feeling that she must say something. They sat silent for a few minutes.

"How yer laks dat man?" he asked finally, then added: "I wouldn' ax dat uv no ord'nary nigger, but I knows dat you knows whut quality is when hit's eroun'."

"I sho does," she said proudly. "Me an' you cain' git useter dese here niggers whut done sprung up

since de surrender; kin us, Unc' Ephraham? Dey ain't no manner uv ercount." He did not reply.

"How does yer size dat man?" he asked.

"Wall, I tell yer," she said slowly and reflectively, "I ain't seed so pow'ful much uv him merse'f, but Dema, she say dat young mistis gits mighty intickler 'bouten her close when she got er idee dat he gwineter come. She ain't keerin' 'bouten dey bein' so special fine er nuthin' lak dat, 'kase she de kin' whut doan' hatter put on no fol-de-rol business, but she des natchelly lay down de law 'bouten dem dresses bein' done up right."

"Um-humph!" grunted old Ephraim, bowing his head understandingly.

"Yas, siree," continued Dilcey, wagging her gray head, "dat's whut Dema say, an' ef dat's so, den yer ornstan' whut dat spell."

The old negro sat in deep thought for some time; finally he raised his head.

"He 'low he f'um Mitchigan,—ain't dat so?" he asked.

"Dat's whut dey sez," was the reply.

"Um-humph!" he remarked slowly. "I doan' lak dat part."

"How come?" she asked.

"Wall," he said thoughtfully, "s'posen dem two wuz ter git married. I is des er s'posen now," he added cautiously. "S'posen dey wuz ter git married, den he gwineter come here an' git ter runnin' dat kin' er talk an' palaver wid de niggers on dis place, des lak all dem Yankees serves deyse'f wid, an' in er mont' I wouldn't gib er chaw er terbacker fer nairy young

nigger on dis place. Niggers dese times cain' stan' nothin' lak dat; dey gits plumb fools in no time."

"Law me!" she exclaimed, "he ain't dat kin'. Naw, sir, he gwineter treat yer right, but he ain't dat kin'. Young mistis wudden' put up wid dem cyarpet-baggin' sorter Yankees, naw siree bob."

"I knows dat," he said quickly, "I knows dat. Yer cain' tol' me nothin' 'bouten dat, chil'. Didn' I holp raise her, I lak ter know?" he asked proudly. He puffed thoughtfully at his pipe for a few moments.

"Naw," he continued, "I des ez lief chaw go'de-vines ez ter fool wid one dem sort merse'f, an' ef my white folks wuz ter tek up wid dat kin', den I is plumb willin' ter gib up all mer notions 'bouten s'iety in evvy way. Dese here white folks whut runs atter sorry niggers, tryin' ter fin' out all dey is ter fin' out 'bouten um when dey had orter know ernuff already ter let um erlone, puts me ter min' uv er fool setter-puppy trailin' 'long atter er frawg thu de grass. Hit ain't no use ter argy, an' hit ain't no use fer ter whistle an' holler. Dat puppy he done got his min' sot on findin' out all dey is ter fin' out 'bouten dat frawg an' den playin' wid it. He gwineter be frien'ly an' 'range er sorter dawg-frawg s'iety, an' so he des keeps er-trailin' 'long atter dat frawg. Terreckly, fus' thing yer know, yer gwineter see dat puppy sorter hunch hisse'f in de middle, an' right den yer gwineter know dat dat puppy he done foun' out. Yas, ma'am, he done made de connection wid knowledge, an' dat knowledge say dat de frawg he better hop wid his kin', an' de dawg he better trot wid his'n. I ain't er-th'owin' no slams at de dawg, an' I ain't er-th'owin' none at de frawg. A!! I sez ter

evvy kin' uv animul whut come outen Nory's Ark is dis here: Trot wid yer kin', gemmans, trot wid, yer kin'. De billy-goat he got his grass ter chaw, an' de sheep he got his'n. Hit done come ter 'rive dat de sheep he stan' higher dan de billy-goat, but de billy-goat he stan' des 'bout ez high ez de balance uv de billy-goats, an' so he orter be plumb satisfied."

The two negroes sat dreaming in the soft autumn moonlight, listening to the plaintive night sounds around them. Suddenly Dilcey looked up.

"Who yer reckon done come back, Unc' Eph?" she asked.

"I dunno," he replied carelessly. "Wid all de comin' an' gwine dat dey is eroun' here, an' me er-gittin' too ol' ter run erbout much, I ain't got no showin' ter say who hit mout be."

"Dat Red Shirt done come back."

"Good Gawd er mussy!" he exclaimed as he tilted his chair forward. "Come ter whar?"

"Come ter Granville."

"Aw," he said in a relieved tone, then added: "Dilcey, le'me tell yer de trufe now. I is er-gittin' ol' an' stiff-j'inted an' rattlety, but my white folks better keep dat nigger way f'um me, fer he sho am gwineter git hurt an' hurt bad. I done gib him all de warnin' whut de law 'lows, but I is gwine up ter Squire Bell's de fus' thing in de mawnin' an' tek out peace papers in reg'lar style, so ez ter be on de safe side; den ef dat nigger cross mer road atter dat, I am sho is gwineter salt his battery wid er passle er blue whistlers right in his middle. Now yer kin des put dat down in de book,"



"Law me!" she exclaimed, "yer wudden do dat sho nuff, would yer, Unc' Ephraham?"

"I doan' want ter do hit," he replied sadly, "I doan' want ter do hit, but"—and he leaned forward and spoke in a low, earnest voice—"Dilcey, hit's done sot down som'ers up in Glory dat yo' Unc' Ephraham got ter kill dat nigger some day ter mek de writin' come clear. I knows bofe de signs an' de fo'signs," he added in solcmn tones, "an' dey is done spoke de wu'ds."

Dilcey sat gazing at the old darky with wonder and even admiration in her eyes. He was prone to repeat, to tell the same stories that she had often heard before, but occasionally he surprised her,—and he had surprised her now. In all her associations with him, she had almost always found him inclined to gentleness and peace, but in regard to Red Shirt it was different. Whenever that negro's name was mentioned the old negro at once began to express his hatred of the man in no uncertain terms.

She regarded him intently for a moment, and then said slowly, as she puffed at her pipe:

"Dey is ernudder one dem cur'us sorter niggers, wid dat squibbly-squabbly talk lak his'n, at Granville."

"G'way f'um here!" he exclaimed. "Whut yer reckon dem strange niggers is er-usin' an' er-bruisin' roun' dis country fer?"

"He call hisse'f er barber," she replied. "He done rented de ol' widder Johnsing's sto' f'um Mars' Wilum. I spec he putty glad ter git de rent, 'kase hit been so long widouten nobody in hit."

"Lak ter know who gwineter let him do dey bobbin'?" he asked with a sniff.

"Dis here one ain't no common fiel'-nigger lak Red Shirt," she explained. "I ain't seed him merse'f, 'kase I ain't been ter town, but Dema she seed him, an' he done tek whut little sense dat nigger got an' done th'owed hit erway. She is er plumb fool, wid all her palaver 'bouten straight ha'r an' John D's."

"John D's," he asked, "whut's dem?"

"She 'low he say dat his gran'pa wuz er Spanish John D. I doan' know whut dat is, but I'm boun' hit's sump'nudder low down. Him an' Red Shirt didn' know deyse'f befo'," she added. "Dey des got 'quainted. Dat air John D nigger say ez how he got tired stayin' whar dey had yaller fever all de time, so he skip out, an' dat how come he ramblin' in dis country."

Old Ephraim filled his pipe, went into the cabin for fire with which to light it, and came out again brushing the ashes from his fingers on to his coat.

"Dilcey," he said, "yer know I hates ter see Mars' Willum sell dat lan'."

"Same wid me," she replied.

"Yas, ma'am," he continued, "hit doan' look right ter do dat, but I spec he gittin' sorter short wid de cash. Cotton ain't fetchin' much dese days, whut little dey is, an' I notices dat whar he useter pull green-backs outen his pocket when he wanten, now he des rattle dis little chicken-feed money an' kinder th'ow his eye up de ribber whar all dem big pines is an' look consarned." He sighed deeply and was silent for some time.

"Whut yer studyin' 'bout?" she asked presently.

"I wuz des sorter lookin' back an' studyin' 'bout ol' Mars' Bill," he replied. "I neber 'longed ter him, an' hit wuz des when he bought my gal Polly, de time when her an' Ni-jim wanted ter git married, dat I come to know him rale good."

"Dat sho wuz er cur-us white man," remarked Dilcey.

"Dat sho wuz one mo' goðd white man," he replied promptly. She would not venture to contradict him, so said nothing.

"Rickolleck dat big pine by de side fence?" he asked. "De one whut de lightnin' struck?"

"Um-humph," she replied.

"Talkin' 'bout dat lan' up de ribber fotch me ter min' uv dat ol' pine. When de trouble days come ter Mars' Bill, he useter set out under dat pine uv er night when de win' wuz er-blowin' an' listen ter dat pine er-swishin' an' er-moanin'. Dat dawg uv his'n wuz ingen'ally right dar wid him."

"I wuz skeered uv dat man," she said. "I 'longed ter him, an' hit got so, 'long ter de las', dat when he look at me wid dem col' eyes uv his'n, hit seem lak I could feel de ghostes er-walkin' crost mer grave."

"Yas," continued Ephraim, passing over her remarks, "when Mars' Bill useter set out under dat pine wid dat dawg uv his'n, all yer hatter do wuz ter crawl roun' de fence de yother side de row uv fig trees, an' right dere yer gwineter fin' Ni-jim er-squattin' down behime de box-bushes, watchin'."

"Whut he watchin' fer?" she asked.

"Now, whut yer reckon he watchin' fer?" he asked with spirit. "He watchin' 'kase Cap'n Brantley done

tol' him dat he reckon Mars' Bill gwineter shoot hisse'f in one dem spells. Dat's how come he watchin' all de time, an' dat's how come he allus takin' de bullet outen Mars' Bill's pistols evvy time dey wuz loaded up. He settin' dere wid er big knife, 'kase he orneasy ef he done right ter tek dem balls outen de pistols, an' he wanten be right dere ter do de wu'k in case sump'n gwineter come ter 'rive whar Mars' Bill hatter serve hisse'f wid er pistol an' hit ain't gwineter kill nothin'. Him an' dat dawg Don, dey done got up er 'rangemint 'mongst deyselves, an' dat's how come when Mars' Bill wuz er-roamin' roun' in de woods an' up in de pine lan' wid dat dawg, an' Ni-jim wuz er-paddlin' 'long de branch bottom er-watchin', dat dawg he des go 'long an' neber tek no notice uv Ni-jim, 'kase dem two dey didn' want Mars' Bill ter ketch on ter de 'rangemints."

"Yer know," she exclaimed, "I didn' know dat biff'o'. I 'lowed dat Ni-jim wuz er-loafin' all de time. He whipped two niggers ter mek um do his wu'k bewhilst he wuz gone all de time, an' he tol' um dat ef dey tol' Mars' Bill, he gwineter kill um sho certain."

"An' I'm boun' dey never tol' it, nother," he said.

"Naw," she replied, "dey didn' had no tol' comin' ter um. Ni-jim he des natchelly foam at de mouf when he git mad, an' he allus wuz keerless wid knives an' sech lak, anyhow."

"Dilcey," he said at last, "ol' Mars' Bill sho had er sad time. I knowed dem Traylor's up in Ferginia. Dey wuz proud people, dey wuz. When Mars' Bill wuz young dey sez he wuz pow'ful good-lookin'. Dat whut cotch de Boston lady whut he married wid atter he done hatter come down here, skusin' uv er spell er

pneumony. Niggers wuz de cause uv it all. She wuz sot ergin slabery, an' he wuz sot fer slabery. He owned de niggers, an' she want him ter sell out an' go Norf. He hatter lib here skusin' uv bein' sickly, so dar's whar dey split up, and so she lit out wid young Mars' Willum an' broke up de home. Dat how come young Mars' Willum doan' know nothin' 'bout farmin', an' done run de place in de hole."

"He sho doan'," replied Dilcey. "He doan' know nothin' 'bout it, an' hit look lak he keer less. He des sit wid er book in his han' all de time an' dream 'bout de man in de moon."

They sat for a moment silent.

"Wall," he said with a sigh, "I sho hates ter see de lan' go."

"Miss Ferginia gwine off dis fall," said Dilcey suddenly.

"Whar she gwine?" he asked.

"Her an' Miss Jess dey gwine up ter Richmon' see dey kinfolks tergedder."

"How yer git dat?" he asked.

"Dat's whut Dema say. She wuz des er-sp'ilin' ter go wid um an' do dey waitin'-on, but now she done back down."

"How come?" he asked.

"She 'low she feared dem steam cyars, but I spec she lyin' 'bout dat."

"How come de reason den?" he asked.

"Dat air John D nigger,—he mixed up wid it, ter my notion."

"When dey gwine?"

"Right recent fo' Christmus sometime," she said.

"Dey gwine ter Mobile fus' ter pick out dey close, an' atter dat dey gwine ter Richmon'."

"Dat settle it," he said firmly.

"Settle whut?"

"Dat settle how come Mars' Willum gwineter sell dat lan'."

He rose with a sigh and, walking over to the doorstep, picked up his stick and started off.

"Wall," he said, as he turned away, "I'm gwineter leab yer."

"Good night," she said. He turned and looked back.

"Dilcey," he called.

"Um-humph," was the reply.

"Yer knows whut I done tol' yer 'bouten dat Red Shirt? Wall, I is got some blue-whistlers useter 'long ter ol' Mars' Bill, an' I is gwineter mer house and load up de gun wid um."

"Dat doan' spell dat yer gwineter kill nobody," she said.

"Naw," he replied slowly. "Yer right. Dat doan' spell nothin', an' doan' yer say nothin' 'bouten whut I done tol' yer, 'kase I reckon I wuz des er-dreamin' all dat, 'kase me an' Red Shirt is allus been sorter crosst-ways."

"All right. I done fergit it," she said, as he turned once more and continued on his way.

When he reached his cabin he sat down on the step and looked up at the soft-lighted sky with awe in his eyes.

"Naw," he murmured, "dat doan' spell nothin', do hit, putty angels up dere? Dat doan' hatter spell nothin' when I walked thu dat sperrit des now, do

hit?" He bowed his head upon his hands and murmured: "Lawdy, Lawdy, ef de fo'signs is so, oh, Lawdy! an' ef I got ter go merse'f, too, mek hit so ez I kin do lak my young marster up on de Ro'noke Ribber, an' go ter Glory widout bein' skeered." He looked up at the sky, and there were tears in his eyes.

"Oh, Lawdy! putty li'l angels," he whispered, "I ain't got nobody lef' seppen mer white folks, an' I ain't neber did raly 'long ter dem. Oh, Lawdy, putty angels," he continued brokenly, "when I is done gone outen dis worl', please tek keer uv my young mistis. I ain't got nobody lef', an' I is des er po' ol' fool nigger, but oh, Lawdy, sweet, putty angels, tek keer uv my young mistis, please gemmans, 'kase—'kase—'kase,"—and he dropped his head and sobbed weakly, "'kase—I—help raise her."

Finally he fell asleep on the step, with his head on his knees. He slept for about half an hour, when the crowing of a rooster awakened him. He arose slowly and went into the cabin with a sigh, where, after lighting a fire, he knelt down by an old trunk and began to search through it for his blue-whistlers. At last he found them and, scrambling slowly to his feet, he walked over and examined them in the light of the pine-knot fire.

"Dere dey is," he murmured as he gazed at them. "Dere is dat little bunch uv kingdom-comes."

Then he took an old musket from the corner, dusted it off, cleaned it and oiled it, and then loaded it carefully and rammed the last wad vigorously.

"Dat," he said, as he placed it back in the corner, "dat whut gwineter mek de writin' come clear."

## CHAPTER VIII

### LOPEZ DE QUINA COMES TO GRANVILLE

In the days known as "fo' de wah" Granville had boasted a millinery store. It was kept by a widow who is now vaguely remembered as a Mrs. Johnson. She had two little children and lived in the room over the store. This room could only be reached by inside stairs, the whole building being simply a box-shaped affair, with a veranda up stairs and a platform down stairs.

Since the war the house had been closed most of the time, having only an occasional tenant, but some days previous to the conversation between Ephraim and Dilcey a strange character had halted Mr. Traylor on the streets of Granville and had rented the place. Later, the doors were swung open, the store-house was thoroughly cleaned and repaired, and a rudely-painted sign announced to the public that one Lopez de Quina had opened a barber shop.

This Lopez de Quina was a swarthy individual with coal-black mustache, hair and eyes, and a manner that impressed one with the idea that somewhere, in some other land, his lot had fallen in not unpleasant places. He spoke English brokenly, but his selection of words indicated a certain amount of education. He said that



of-a-wisp an' de nightmare. I have consider dis business wid attention, an' in reply I have say, 'Yes, I will go.' It is enough, it is sufficient, it is complete. I am here, I, General Lopez de Quina. An' my sword? It is dere in de corner. *Madre de Dios*, it is my heart an' my han'. De success, it will be magnificent; de honor, it will be great; de glory, it will be beyon' compare; an' de gol' money, it will be like much rain water in de summer-time—a great deal." He smiled again, waited for a moment, and then asked softly:

"How far you goes, Mister Green?"

Red Shirt eyed the preacher curiously. If the man should refuse, then his doom would be sealed. He knew too much, and Red Shirt had on one occasion spoken much too freely. An iron window-weight lay just back of Red Shirt's chair on a box, and under the preacher's chair was spread a thick, wide rug. The preacher sat facing De Quina, but Red Shirt's chair had been placed at one side. The two men had arranged the thing as carefully as a bit of staging. Red Shirt's fingers itched and his eyes glittered as he watched the preacher and waited for the reply. Aaron Green's fingers laced and unlaced themselves nervously for a moment. He had not seen the window-weight and had not considered the position of the chairs, nor did he know that the fire burning in the open fireplace awaited the coming of a bloody rug. His lips moved and his face showed the working of powerful emotions. Suddenly he leaned forward, poured out a glass full of whisky and tossed it down his throat with a shudder. The light seemed to him to grow dim and far away. In his ears he heard a beating



“ How far you go, Mister Green? ” again asked De Quina  
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like the waves of a mighty sea, then the scene slowly came back to him,—the room with the two men sitting watching him, the heavy, black man with his gleaming eyes and his inscrutable face, and the slender, brown man who smiled and smiled and continued to tap his glass upon his knee.

Perhaps, of the three who sat there, the preacher alone realized the awfulness of the undertaking. He alone understood the situation fully and knew what failure meant when once the die was cast.

The others cared but little for this. They only knew that above all things they needed Aaron Green's co-operation. De Quina was almost a stranger, and Red Shirt was both hated and feared by the blacks; neither of them had influence.

But this man, this tall, melancholy-visaged orator, held the hearts of those whom they desired to reach, influence and control. This brain, that had been taught and guided by the white man, knew the ways of the white men's world, and this tongue, with its mighty power to lead or drive, was worth the subtle arguments of a thousand men.

De Quina studied him earnestly, watching the conflicting emotions in the preacher's face. "All that we need he holds, as it were, in the hollow of his hand," he was thinking. "With us he is a tower of strength. Without him the day is distant. If he is against us, we can do nothing; but if he fails us now, Aaron Green must die."

They sat in silence for some moments.

"How far you go, Mister Green?" again asked De Quina.

The preacher started as from a dream; his face worked convulsively for a moment, and the sweat stood upon his forehead. All that was good in him fought and struggled with the evil. Mentally he had often fallen, but this was another matter. Mind, body, heart and soul must go into this work, and now that the moment for final decision had come, the good in him fought and the cowardly part of him quailed and shuddered.

"How far you go, Mister Green?" said a voice, but the smile had almost disappeared from the Cuban's lips, and his white teeth gleamed beneath what was changing to a menacing sneer.

"By God," came from the depths of the preacher's throat in husky tones, "I go the whole way!"

Red Shirt looked at De Quina and the latter nodded his head approvingly.

"Dat mek it all right," he said as he shook the preacher's hand heartily. Aaron Green sank back in his chair and wiped the sweat from his face with a trembling hand. Down on the road somebody laughed; it was a loud guffaw from some drunken negro who was passing, but it sent a shiver over his body.

De Quina now took the bottle and poured drinks for the three. The preacher did not hesitate this time, but took the glass eagerly, and they swallowed their whisky in silence. When they had set the glasses down, Red Shirt wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"I'm got dat fix," he said with a grin.

"Oh, well, dat's easy," said De Quina. "De harda part he come later. Dat all for you an' de preacher. My parta," and he straightened himself up proudly

and tapped his chest, "my parta I work out an' mek de fina plan, an' den all be fine."

The three sat talking for some hours, and when they finally parted each knew fairly well what the plans were and what his own work was to be. They swore wondrous oaths to keep their plans secret and to work in conjunction with each other and to a common end, and then the meeting was over.

Just as the two visitors started to descend, De Quina drew the preacher back and, opening a small trunk, exhibited to him a package of bank-notes.

"How much?" asked Green.

"T'ousan' dollar," said De Quina with a smile, "an' dat not be de droppa de bucket."

"Is it safe?" asked the preacher.

De Quina drew back his coat and tapped the butt of a big revolver meaningly.

"I t'ink maybe he safe," he said.

"Yare," said Red Shirt, as he shot a swift glance at De Quina, "he safe all right." They descended the stairs, where the Cuban let them out, and they separated quickly and disappeared in the darkness.

## CHAPTER IX

### VIRGINIA

Martin Wentworth rode slowly across the bridge on the road leading into Granville, holding under his arm some books wrapped in a piece of newspaper. As he came to the top of the hill just at the edge of the village, where the direct route led straight on through it and the other swung sharply away to the north, he paused. It was rather dark, and no one would notice, he was thinking, so he leaned over his mare's neck and whispered: "Which shall it be, Alabama?"

The mare stood pawing and champing at her bit.

"Which shall it be?" he again whispered, half in shame.

Alabama threw her ears forward and glanced straight up the road.

"Well," he sighed, "it's straight up the road I go," and he touched her gently and rode on.

Three times had the same thing occurred recently, and three times he had gone straight ahead. This time it was a negro coming down the road that had attracted the mare's attention.

He hitched her at the Brantleys' gate, patted her nose, sighed, and walked listlessly up the pathway leading to the house. There he mounted the steps slowly and, pausing at the door, twirled the wheezy

little bell and waited. In a few moments he heard a door open and Captain Brantley came down the hall and admitted him. Then he had to wait for some minutes in the parlor, so he sat staring at the familiar objects in the room in a rather dead-hearted way. His gaze wandered slowly round on a tour of investigation, and Jessica's portrait caught his eye. He remembered the occasion when he first saw it and stood in admiration before it.

"'My daughter, Jessie,'" he repeated, "'done some two years ago.'"

Soon he heard a door open and close, and the familiar footsteps came down the hall. He heard the whisk of her dress as she neared the door, and rose to meet her with outstretched hand.

"Why," she exclaimed with a smile, as she took his proffered fingers in a firm clasp, "I am glad to see you. I was as lonesome as could be. Mother found some very old copies of *Godey's* and is reading *Miss Slimmin's Window*, or *Miss Slimmin's Window Curtains*, or something like that, and father is puffing his pipe over a copy of *Littell's*; and so I was completely frozen out, and am glad you came."

He dropped into a chair. "Had to come," he murmured.

"Had to come?" she repeated, with a little widening of the eyes, but with the smile still hovering on her lips.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I had to come, because I have got 'em."

"Got 'em?" she queried. "What are they? Are they catching?"



"Dumps," he rejoined mournfully.

"Why, that is too bad!" she replied, with a little *moue* of sympathy that slipped into his heart gratefully.

"Yes," he continued, "I just had to come. I was lonesome, and I wanted to see you, and—"

Here her lips tightened just a bit and an artery in her throat throbbed a little quicker.

He broke off abruptly and, turning to her, said pleadingly: "Play something for me, or sing something, won't you, please?" She rose with a little laugh.

"Why, certainly," she said softly. "Poor fellow! You must indeed have them if you hope for help from my playing or singing. What shall it be, John; what shall it be?" she continued cheerily, as she turned to her music.

"Not that," he pleaded. "Just you and the piano. I want it from the heart, not from paper."

She dropped down on the stool with a little moan of resignation.

"O King," she said, looking toward him with a mock air of deep humility, "graciously direct thy servant in the channels of thy desire, and may the gods so will that her unworthy efforts displease thee not!"

He looked at her uncertainly for a moment, the little ring of mockery in her tone stirring him almost to resentment.

"Come," she said, brightening up, "shall it be something quick and—and—the balance?"

"Wait until I get to that," he said. "I shall be lifted to it presently. Play something just now a bit owlish, and maybe with some left-over funeral flowers and a hearse-horse plume or two. Something on the *Death-*

*and-Burial-of-Little-Nell* order. Oh," he exclaimed, "play *The Flower Song!*"

"Shut that door!" she directed. "Father says the piece just goes moaning and howling over his nerves, and he can't stand it."

He closed the door and she played, while he leaned back in his chair and stared dreamily at the ceiling.

"It did me a world of good," he said when it was finished. "Now then, play *Alice, Where Art Thou?*" he pleaded.

"I'm better now," he said, as she turned from the piano. "I thank you."

"I certainly hope so," she replied, "with those doleful things that I played for you. If I had added some more old-timey things, like *Douglas* and *See That My Grave's Kept Green* and that *Handful of Dust* song, I am sure you would be quite cheerful and chirrupy; but I should have had them, as you say, in your stead."

"Well," he said, with a peaceful sigh, "I don't think you could have them. That is all surmise, but I do know that I am almost cheerful now, so let's to facts."

"Well," she said tentatively.

"Is it settled finally and for good that you and Miss Virginia are going away?"

"Yes, I hope so," she replied. "I, for one, certainly want to go."

They were silent a moment, and his gaze again settled on her picture.

"I think," he said, with a plaintive note in his voice, "that I shall take a vacation, too. I have swamp-fever, or I'm homesick, or something, for every time I think

of the winter months, with you two gone, I get the blues dreadfully. I haven't been away, except on little business trips, since I came here. I have to sit evenings and listen to the *baroomp* of a lot of hoarse-voiced frogs, and I have got so when I try to read that I just stare at the book. I have most certainly got 'em, and got 'em bad."

"I don't blame you for getting the blues over there at the mill," she said sympathetically. "It must be dreadful for you, anyway, after all the good times you have had, to have to stay down here at this little country place. It's hard enough for me most of the time, and I can't help being glad to get away for a while, though I do dearly love this whole country. I remember how I watched the corn all the way down from Virginia when I came home the first time. There it had just sprung up, while here it was almost grown. Then, when we began to dip down into the lowlands, and the banks of the creeks were a mass of ivy and honeysuckle, I drew just as much of the air into my lungs as I could, for it felt good and smelt of home."

"It is pretty," he said, hardly knowing just what he was saying.

"Do you know how we came to decide on going?" she asked.

"No," he replied. Then added maliciously: "Except that perhaps you thought of it, and it seemed good."

She wrinkled her nose at him spitefully.

"No, we didn't," she answered. "Now guess again!"

"I am sure if you didn't think of it, I am hopeless, so far as guessing it is concerned," he said, with a gesture of despair, "I am not good at guessing, any-

way. I could never have guessed even about 'Horn ate a Horn in a High Oak Tree,' if some one hadn't told me. I think if you should take that to Delphi the Oracle would hide out."

"Well," she replied, "I will enlighten you. We didn't think of it; at least I didn't. Virginia was here some time ago and spent the day. We were up stairs in my room, looking over some old school-day things of mine, when she caught me by the shoulders and shook me suddenly and most vigorously. 'Jessica Brantley,' she cried, 'if you don't hunt up something to amuse me, I am going to lie right down on the floor and kick my heels against it and scream just as loud as I can.'"

"Do girls do that?" he asked, looking at her with earnest eyes.

"They do, your Majesty," she replied solemnly. "They often do, and for a case of nerves or dumps I recommend the practice. Try it to-night when you go home, and you will find that it gives much better results than having me wail out a lot of mournful songs for you. The more noise you make, the better. It benefited us a great deal." She laughed heartily at the puzzled look on his face.

"Tell me about it," he said. "I interrupted you."

"We did," she replied, "for I agreed to join her. We kicked our heels against the floor as hard as we could. I suggested that she scream first, but she refused, saying that, on such occasions, it was always the hostess' duty to pitch the tune. Long usage, you know," continued Jessica suavely, "has made this the rule, but I had forgotten it. You can ask 'most any

girl and she will tell you this is a fact. It is exceedingly bad form to scream before your hostess does, and especially so in the case of Virginia and myself, because I scream soprano and she screams contralto. It was my duty to raise the tune. She reminded me of it, but I didn't have the heart in me to do it, somehow or other, and so I began with a weak one. She at once clapped her hand over my mouth, and in a very few minutes we were engaged in a most desperate pillow-fight. We must have made an awful lot of noise, for mother came and told us about things in her day, and called me a romp. Now, do I look like a romp?" she asked poutingly.

Martin smiled.

"Of course I don't," she continued, with decision in her voice. "Neither does Virginia; mother was mistaken, but Virginia certainly did pound me unmercifully with a bolster after mother had left us. At last we were too tired to fight any more, and sat breathlessly giggling at each other. I forgot to mention for your enlightenment," she continued, "that girls also sometimes play at the game of giggles, and on that particular day I held nothing but trumps."

He laughed softly; then, remembering that they had wandered from the story of the trip to Virginia, he reminded her of it.

"Oh, yes," she cried, "it is easily explained. A letter came to me from my aunt in Richmond. She asked me to pay her a visit, and requested that Virginia come, too. She also has relatives there, you know, and we were both there for a few days to see the unveiling of the Lee statue some years ago. The house-girl brought

the letter to my room just when Virginia and I were sitting, resting from the pillow-fight."

"So that is the way it came about?"

"Yes," she replied. "The combination of blues, a pillow-fight and the invitation to Richmond was more than we could stand. We succumbed without a struggle."

Just at that moment some one drove up and stopped at the gate. There was a moment's pause, and then came the crack of a whip, and a vehicle drove quickly away. Jessica could hear the frightened plunge of the horse as he started. She knew who the driver was, and her face colored slightly, but Martin was gazing up at a picture on the wall just opposite him, and did not notice it.

"What is the news at the mill?" she asked a bit hurriedly.

"The same old thing," he replied. "Nothing new." Then added: "Oh, yes, there is, too; I employed that negro called Red, or Red Shirt, some time ago. You remember he left here, saying that he was going on a voyage somewhere. He told me he tried at Pensacola and also at Mobile, but could not get a place on a vessel. He stayed in Mobile until his money gave out, and then he thought of the mill and came back. He is a powerful negro, and one of the very best hands we have."

So they sat chatting for some time, first about one thing and then another, and finally they drifted back to a discussion of the Richmond trip, and he talked about it most mournfully. At last he gave her the books he had brought, and rose to go. She accom-

panied him out to the piazza, where a rosebud, perfect and white, caught her eye.

"Wait a moment," she said, and plucked it for him.

"Fasten it on my coat, please, will you not?" he asked. She took it again, and he stood on the second step from the top while she pinned it on the lapel of his coat. She looked up into his face, for, even standing below her as he did, he was nevertheless a little taller than she.

*"Comme vous êtes grand, Monsieur,"* she said softly.

*"Comme vous êtes belle,"* he replied in a gentle voice.

He caught her cool, soft hands in his own as though to bid her good night, and, stooping suddenly, touched them with his lips. She withdrew them quickly, but was silent, though it seemed that the beating of her heart would stifle her. Every chord of her nature and every fiber of her heart yearned for him and for his love. She had loved him long, and she had known it long. He had come to her in the beginning with a gentleness and yet with a masterfulness that had made her feel his strong personality, and, while she outwardly rebelled against his calm assumption of dominion over the shaping of her wishes on several occasions, inwardly she had delighted in her own defeat and had cuddled his mastery to her heart.

He stood regarding her white face curiously for a moment. An almost irresistible desire was upon him to draw her to him and kiss her softly on the forehead, not because of love for her, but because she stood before him, pleasing to the eye; because his heart was restless and he was unhappy, and because, beyond and above everything else, something tempted him. For a

moment he stood hesitating,—a moment in which there sped between these two those joining gossamers of thought and feeling which, if they draw men and women together, leave in the end an unloved wife,—if broken, leave one heart sadly wounded. His throat tightened and his hands clenched as he fought the temptation back.

“Good night,” she said tremulously.

“Good night,” he replied hoarsely, and, turning, walked stumblingly down the steps.

As Martin passed slowly down the graveled path, Jessica closed the door softly and, after turning out the light in the parlor, went with weak and trembling steps to her room. Her face was white and the pupils of her eyes were dilated. She placed her hand over her heart and held it there for a moment.

“How it beats!” she murmured. “Oh, how it beats!” Then she sank into a chair and sat quiet for a long time.

When Martin reached the cross-roads he pulled the rein gently and sat looking at the stars that winked hard and bright far in the north; there was little softness in their light. Slowly he guided Alabama into the road to the north and then, speaking quickly to her, sped over the soft white road at a swinging gallop. The wind in his face stirred his blood and a fierceness came over him. This was what he needed, he told himself. The humdrum and monotony of his life was eating out his heart, but already a sense of elation was creeping over him, and he stirred the mare to greater speed. Away they went, past cotton-fields, gray-white in the darkness, past negro cabins and clumps of



trees, on to the north without thought or hope and indeed without sorrow. He sat high in the saddle and a chill exhilaration, wrought of heavy-heartedness slipping away, stole through his veins, and he heard only as in a dream the rhythmical beat of the mare's hoofs on the sandy road.

At last he halted, and far ahead of him he saw a light shining through a window. It was Mr. Traylor's room. He was studying, perhaps; he was always studying. And she? She, too, was there somewhere. Somewhere in the shadows of the place she was doubtless sleeping. Sleeping—dreaming; dreaming of Virginia, of its mountains, its valleys, its cedar-covered hills, and its fields of blue-grass. Dreaming of old colonial mansions with their heavy white columns, their broad, velvet-green lawns, of parties and balls, of gallants and gowns and all the things that make life to the young worth living. He stared ahead with a now heavy heart. It would all be so lonely, so empty, so dreary, so very dreary, when she was gone.

As Martin sat dreaming, a light came into his face and there was a stir in his heart such as he had never known. A breeze sighed through the feathery leaves of the mimosa tree that spread its branches above him, and with the coming of the sigh he stretched out his arms toward her home, toward her, and whispered softly: "Virginia! O Virginia!"

His hands fell back and sought the bridle, and he bowed his head. Again he looked up and murmured her name tenderly and reverently.

It had come to him suddenly, the realization of it all; out of the fierce half-hatred, out of her beauty and

a sense of distance. It had come into his heavy and hopeless heart, and with wide pupils and rapt face he stretched forth his arms and sighed his soul to her. The feathery plumes above him seemed to catch it as it came, and about and about it was whispered back to him, "Virginia! Virginia!"

With him it was not the realization of a little thing, —a something to cherish for a while and then to forget. It was an earnest and an humble love, an admixture of worship and affection, the giving of all and for always.

So he sat there in the starlight with the realization of the truth in his heart and a soft, glad light in his eyes, looking toward where she lay asleep and conjuring up all the fair dreams of future days of happiness, as men have done since hearts first stirred to love.

At last he awoke from his dream and, breathing toward her a message from his heart, he turned with a sigh toward home.

## CHAPTER X

### A MEETING IN THE DARK

What the governor is to the engine, so is realization to every energy and emotion of the human body, mind and heart. The story of *The Ship That Found Herself* is but a symbolic treatment, a mechanical representation of every human life that has floundered through doubt and indecision to a knowledge of itself and has then passed on along the ranges of its measure to the fulfilling of a purpose.

There are more sailless seas within the human heart, more beautiful, sunlit islands and more bleak and barren shores than all the oceans of the many worlds afford. As the field narrows, the range widens and *Un Voyage autour de ma Chambre* may extend beyond the limits of the farthest star. So it is that narrowing it again, we may safely say that the author of *Le Voyage autour de mon Coeur* will never be born. Because there is a pleasure in this finding, it has not been denied us.

Men journey along through the morasses of indecision, stepping with uneasy tread from tuft to tuft of sheer good fortune until, at last, looking within, they find their way and walk in doubt no more.

There is a song that is sung in many lands and in

many tongues. The melody is old and its plaintive sweetness is now seldom heard, yet there exist but few, no matter how rude and rugged their lives, how cheerless the environment of body or of heart, who, upon hearing it sung and turning their thoughts inward, can not see a fairer picture than this world can give.

*"Kennst du das Land wo die Citronen blühen?"*

So it was that, riding slowly homeward, Martin Wentworth's thoughts wandered among the beautiful islands of the heart, green with a mild and ever-present summer; islands strewn with wonderful flowers like sprays of snow and swords of flame, where gay-plumaged birds sang sweetly and crystal streams murmured with complaining voices that they must leave such beauty far behind and journey to the sea; islands whose splendid verdure exhaled spicy odors, and the fragrance from whose blossoms softened the breezes that wandered among them, gentle as a happy sigh and sweet as contentment; islands of dreams and of rosy delights, a paradise with never a serpent and with no laws save the simple laws of kindness and of love.

We seldom turn to dreams of hand-wrought splendors for delight. The farther we have grown away from nature and from what she has to give, the sweeter seems to us the music of pipes in Arcadia and of Lydian flutes.

Turning the pages written by the greatest of bards, we pass wonderingly over the splendid beauty of his thought; we wander mid his scintillations and his rosy lights, his stately palaces and his groupings of kings

and queens, but at last we turn with a restful sigh to the simple picture of nature unchanged by the hand of man :

“I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,  
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,  
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,  
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.”

It is a simple picture, a beautiful picture and one to which the heart of a lover turns with gladness, while to her who has led him to a realization of its beauty, he murmurs in his dream: “Come thou with me.”

Martin had found himself, and with his heart far away on seas of bliss, he began to sing softly from *Mignon* as he rode slowly along :

“Knowest thou that sweet land where the orange flowers bloom?”

He had no fear of the future and no care for the future. He only knew he loved Virginia with all his heart and would win her if it might be possible. He was at peace with the world and loved the world, so, with a smile on his lips, he looked back toward the north and wafted to her a tender good night.

He touched his mare gently and, stirring from her walk, she sped over the soft white road homeward. Soon they turned into the road leading through Granville and down toward the river. Over the bridge they passed, slackening the speed to a walk, the mare's hoofs thundering upon the floor with a hollow sound.

Striking the light, sandy soil on the farther side, the mare resumed her gallop homeward without being urged, her rider sitting half in a dream. Suddenly, as

they turned into a wood, Martin heard the muffled clatter of hoofs coming rapidly toward him from the direction of the mill. He drew rein quickly, swerving to the right to avoid the reckless horseman, but they struck violently as they passed in the darkness and Martin was almost thrown. He recovered immediately and whirled his mare to see how the stranger had fared, riding a few paces toward the bridge that he might see more clearly, it being quite dark in the woods. As the inquiry was about to leave his lips, he saw that the rider was upon him; there was the hiss of a riding-whip and the blow landed squarely upon his shoulder, biting deep. He had no weapon, but struck out fiercely with his fist and pressed forward, intending to pull his opponent from his horse.

"No, you don't," called a hoarse, thick voice; "you try to close in on me or to pull a gun and I'll blow your brains out, you infernal gawk!" Martin saw the gleam of a revolver as it swung toward him and a sensation of helplessness came over him.

"I am unarmed," he called. "Who are you?"

"Want me on your vis'tin' list, I reckon," was the thick, sneering reply. "Thought you'd run over me, but you are up against the wrong proposition." The man was evidently under the influence of whisky and, as the answer came to Martin, he could hardly believe his senses.

"Is that you, Tiffin?" he asked as gently as possible, considering his anger.

"Yes, this is Tiffin," was the answer, "and Tiffin hopes that he cut you in the face with the rawhide."

Martin was now almost choking with anger.

"This is Martin Wentworth," he called, "and I hope you didn't know who it was, and I also hope that you are too drunk to know what you are doing, for otherwise I propose to punish you for this."

"Martin Wentworth?" came the sneering reply. "Is that so? Damned euphonious name,—but I hope I cut you in the face all the same."

"Go on to town!" cried Martin in a ringing voice, fighting down his anger as best he could. "I'll settle with you to-morrow; you are drunk."

"That's where you lie," came the quick answer. "If there's to be a settlement, why, let's settle now. Procrastination's a poor business when one man cuts another with a whip and then calls him a liar on top of it. Let's get down; I don't want my horse shot,—think too much of him."

Tiffin dismounted heavily and spoke softly to his horse. "That's all right, Sir Roger, old boy, jus' get in the woods and you won't get hurt." He slapped the animal's flank gently and the intelligent horse stepped quickly out of the road into the edge of the woods and stood still.

"I have no pistol," said Martin.

"That's all right," was the reply; "I've got a pair; give you your choice and let you decide distance and everything. You can't wiggle out that way. Come on out into the light; I am going to settle this thing right now."

Martin's blood went cold. Did the man really mean to kill him? he wondered. They had never had a difference of any kind, and Tiffin had always appeared to be his friend. He must be crazy.

"Come on," was the sneering call, "or must I come and pull you off?"

Martin, who had not dismounted, followed slowly and watched Tiffin as they proceeded from under the trees. The latter was staggering badly in the heavy sand of the road. Martin pulled on his rein and his mare halted.

"Good God!" he was thinking. "But a few moments ago I was dreaming the happiest dreams of my life, and now I am about to fight a duel in the dark with a man who is crazy drunk and to whom I have done nothing. What if he kills me? What if I kill him? One is as bad as the other, and in either case it means ruin for me,—utter ruin and an end of everything."

"Let's put this off until to-morrow," he said hoarsely. "We can see better then." Tiffin turned on him fiercely.

"You don't want to fight it out, then?" he cried. "Is there anything I can say or do to insult you? If there is, name it and you will get it, you cowardly puppy!"

The sweat broke out on Martin's face. "This is awful," he muttered between his teeth; "and yet I can't kill him in this way or be killed by him."

"I'll see you to-morrow," he called with laboring breath, and, turning his mare, rode back into the woods and on toward the mill. Far behind him he heard jeers of contempt that made him squirm in the saddle. His brain was whirling and he ground his teeth.

"Oh, I'll kill him for this to-morrow," he groaned, "if he remembers it."

He rode rapidly on to the house, put up his mare



and unlocked the door with trembling hands. Reaching his room, he walked the floor for an hour, his face pale with anger and his heart torn with conflicting emotions. Tears came into his eyes,—tears of rage.

“Oh, I wish now that I had fought him and killed him or been killed by him,” he cried. “To have to take all that, and for nothing!” and he threw himself on his bed and groaned.

He lay there for a long time, his very soul wrung with agony, but at last he became quiet and a grim determination crept into his heart. He would bend Tiffin low to-morrow, very low, or break him. So he arose and undressed and then lay down to a troubled, broken sleep.

## CHAPTER XI

### WITH NATURAL WEAPONS

When Martin awoke the next morning the memory of the occurrence of the previous night flashed over him like a hideous dream. He arose and, examining his shoulder, found an ugly mark where the blow from the riding-whip had fallen.

"It is no dream," he muttered, as he ground his teeth with rage. "Take that from him? Never. I had rather be dead." He ate but little breakfast and then, walking into the president's office, told him he wanted to get off for the day. Mr. Oliver drummed for a moment with his fingers on the desk.

"Business or pleasure?" he asked.

"Business of my own," was the quick reply.

The president looked at him strangely for a moment and then smiled.

"All right, go ahead!" he said. "There are some things I wanted you to do to-day, but to-morrow will do just as well."

Martin thanked him and then returned to his room, where he sat down to write some letters. The first one was to his mother, and when he had finished it he put his head down on his arms and the tears came into his eyes.

"It will break her heart either way it turns out," he murmured bitterly; "but I can't help it."

After this he wrote some more letters and placed them all in his desk. Then he hurriedly scribbled a note, telling where they might be found, and this he placed in his pocket, together with the key to his desk, and then went out to saddle his mare. This finished, he returned to his room and, taking a revolver of heavy caliber, placed fresh cartridges in it and, with grim jaw and relentless determination in his eyes, set out for Granville.

When he reached the store of Anderson and Tiffin he saw several people he knew standing about the entrance, so he rode around to the back door, hitched his mare and entered.

Walter was up near the front of the store waiting on some customers, so Martin asked the porter, Bob, to call him. It was a minute or two before he came, but he soon turned the customers over to a clerk and emerged from behind the counter. As he walked down the store Martin noticed he was pale and there were dark circles under his eyes. He was dressed entirely in black, but Martin did not think of this at the time.

"Do you want to see me?" he asked quietly, looking up with calm eyes.

"Yes," replied Martin, "let's step outside where we shall not be disturbed." He turned and they walked out together, stopping under a locust that grew near the back door.

"Mr. Tiffin," began Martin, with quivering face and *strained* voice, "you met me last night on the road

just beyond the bridge and without any cause on earth struck me with your riding-whip and further insulted me in a most cowardly and ungentlemanly manner. I have come for a settlement of the matter."

Walter looked up at him, and a fierce gleam stole into his black eyes.

"I insulted you last night?" he asked in a tone of surprise.

"You did," was the reply.

"I am glad to hear you say so," came from Walter's fast-whitening lips. "I didn't think I *could* insult you."

The words came to Martin like a slap in the face and he drew back as though to strike a blow, but Walter stepped quickly out of reach and raised his hand warningly.

"No, not here," he said. "There are ladies in the store and, besides, I mix in no brawl here. This," he continued, and his voice had a fierce ring, "is between us alone and is not for the public. If you want to raise a disturbance here at the store, I shall have to call a couple of niggers and have them kick you off the place. Unless you mean business, why, I have business to attend to and will leave you."

He turned with a sneer of contempt on his lips and started toward the door.

"Come back!" called Martin in a choking voice.

Walter turned and regarded him with questioning eyes.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"I came here to kill you," was the fierce reply.

Walter gazed at him a moment, and then laughed almost merrily.

"All right, Don Quixote," he said. "I suppose I shall be given a chance,—or do you intend to drop me as I stand?"

"Get your pistol," was the reply.

"Have you your own?" asked Walter politely.

"I have," said Martin.

"All right, then," replied Walter with a sneer. "I have a pair and would have let you select either one of them, in case you had forgotten your own."

There was a special stress laid on the word "forgotten" that cut like a knife.

"Say,—you stop those insults or I'll shoot you down like a dog," burst from Martin's lips.

"I shouldn't be surprised at all," was the reply. "I consider you quite capable of it; blaze away!"

He regarded Martin a moment with defiant eyes, then laughed again, and, turning, walked into the store, where he called Bob and directed him to saddle Sir Roger at once. In a few minutes the negro returned, leading the horse, and Walter stepped out of the door with a pair of saddle-bags in his hand.

Martin hated him from the very depths of his heart; every muscle and nerve in his body ached and tingled with the desire to seize his enemy and break and mangle him until he died; and yet it suddenly stole upon him, as such things strangely will, that Walter was an exceedingly handsome young man. He had always been the life of every group or party of which he had been a member, ever since Martin had known him and been thrown in his company, and his face had more often been gay and careless than otherwise; but now, as he walked to his horse his jaw was set and

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there was a peculiar look in his eyes, a tenseness about his nostrils that spoke more than words of anger. Martin felt that Tiffin meant to kill him if he could.

"Great God!" he thought. "What can it all mean? What can it mean? Had he rather die or rather kill me than apologize?"

Walter handed the saddle-bags to Bob and then swung lightly into the saddle, when the negro returned them to him and he slipped them into position.

"This way," he called, looking back at Martin, who was cantering up to his side. They passed out by the side of the store, entered the street and rode in silence toward the river. Down the hill they went, passing over the bridge, and at last turned into an old and seldom-used road that led to the south. Walter was in front and Martin followed in silence. Soon they left this road and, turning toward the river, came in a few moments to a broad, level space under some giant magnolias. The spot was singularly free from obstructions of any kind and the ground was, for the most part, covered with thick, green moss.

"Are you satisfied with the place?" asked Walter.

"I am," was the curt reply.

"Then let's to business," said Walter as he dismounted. They led their horses some distance away and tied them securely in a thicket. When they returned, Walter took a quick survey of the ground, then looked up through the branches of the trees to catch the exact measure of light and shade, so as to make the positions to be chosen as nearly equal as possible.

"What distance do you suggest?" he asked politely of Martin, who stood regarding him sullenly.

"It is immaterial to me," was the reply.

"Well, I suggest twenty steps," said Walter. "You can do the counting after we are both ready and, at the call of three, we will whirl and fire until the matter is done."

"Suits me," said Martin.

Walter measured the distance and marked the positions with his heel. Turning back toward Martin, he drew a coin from his pocket.

"Now for positions," he said. "The one toward the river is better than the other; it is a bit more in the shadow." He held the coin out to Martin. "Throw," he said.

"Throw it yourself," was the answer. Walter shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he replied. "It's two out of three. Do the calling."

The coin spun quickly from his fingers high in the air and, as it poised for an instant before the fall, Martin called "heads." The coin fell "tails." Again the toss was made, again Martin called "heads!" and again the coin fell "tails."

"The choice is mine," said Walter. "I choose the stand,"—here he hesitated for a moment and his lips pinched tightly together,—"toward the river."

A sneer came on Martin's lips. He felt somehow that he was to die and a certain grim satisfaction came to him from the fact that fate seemed to be against him in everything.

Walter went to his saddle-bags, brought them and placed them on the ground. Martin watched him with dull indifference as he threw the cartridges from each

revolver, twirled the cylinders to see that they reloaded properly, and then tried each with a practised hand to select the one that suited him best. This done, he reloaded the one chosen and placed the other, together with the loose cartridges, in the saddle-bags, positioning the loaded one upon a little patch of moss. Martin drew his pistol from his pocket and placed beside the other on the ground. They were almost exactly alike both in caliber and in size.

He noticed that Walter was dressed entirely in black and that he had turned up his coat collar to conceal his face. He had read somewhere that this was the proper thing to do. There was nothing for his aim to depend on. Should he hesitate for the briefest instant would be over. He regarded his own attire. He stood on a gray suit without a vest, and he also wore a blue and white striped negligée shirt. He thought for a moment of buttoning the coat, but, as a sudden surge of hopelessness came over him, he rose, tore it off and flung it from him, standing, drawn to his full height, a fair a mark as a man ever shot at. Walter regarded him in amazement.

"Why, you don't want to do that," he cried. "I can't find any stripe on your shirt that you may point out."

"I don't care if you do. The sooner you do it, the better, but I tell you right now that I am going to kill you, if I have to crawl to you on my knees and choke the life out of your body."

Walter looked him full in the face and, seeing the hopelessness and despair written on it, his own face grew paler.

"Look here," he cried sharply, "I can't do this. It



would be almost murder to fight you this way." He stepped quickly to his pistol and, taking it up, seized a small piece of wood and tossed it high in the air. Raising the revolver, he fired rapidly, striking the piece of wood twice. As the larger portion fell to the ground, he followed it with his aim, turning and tearing it until the last cartridge was exploded. Then he tossed the pistol from him and turned to Martin.

"I can't kill you that way," he said. "You can't shoot. I'm one of the best pistol-shots in the state."

Martin regarded him wildly for a moment. "Can't fight me?" he cried in a fierce tone.

"No, I can't kill you that way."

"By the eternal gods, you will fight me!" he almost shrieked, stepping close to his enemy. "It's gone this far, and it's going through, and if you don't get your other pistol and shoot it out, I am going to kill you anyway."

Walter shrugged his shoulders. "It's your privilege," he replied quietly. "I can't shoot a man who has got the look in his face and eyes that you have."

"You will get it and fight me," he called again, and quick as a flash he struck Walter full in the face with his open hand.

A hoarse cry broke from Walter's throat, and he sprang forward like a beast and struck his enemy a crashing blow on the jaw. Martin staggered back from the force of the stroke, being entirely unprepared for an attack of that kind, and in an instant the two were fighting fiercely, hammer and tongs, give and take, with never a thought of other weapons than those that nature had provided.

Martin was quite six feet tall, strongly fashioned and very agile. Walter was something over two inches shorter, of slighter build and quick as a panther.

The fight grew fiercer as it progressed. Around and around they turned, Martin lunging heavily and Walter side-stepping, blocking and countering. It was an evenly-matched fight, both giving and receiving punishment without flinching. Suddenly Walter drew clear of his opponent, spit the blood from his mouth and fainted with both hands. In that moment Martin's guard was open and Walter's left shot out, straight to the nose. In a flash he followed it with a crashing right, which landed on Martin's eye, both men grunting, one at the strain of delivering the blow and the other from the shock of receiving it. Martin staggered, and a right and a left, followed by another right, brought him to his knees. He felt himself going and became utterly wild. "Damn you!" he sputtered, "damn you!" and stumbling to his feet as Walter struck at him again, he ducked the blow and caught his opponent in his arms. He felt he was losing in a give and take fight and sought to jerk Walter to him, but the latter, instead of drawing back, sprang forward with all his force and butted Martin under the chin and the two went down together. There was a blow or two struck while they were on the ground, and then Walter broke loose, Martin seizing his coat as they rose to their feet. One, two, three, the blows came in his face, but he hung blindly on and drew his enemy to him, fastening his arms in a tight embrace. Quickly he raised him, Walter struggling desperately to break the hold, but to no purpose. The blood was in

Martin's eyes from a cut on his forehead, where Walter's ring had ripped it open. His head roared like the surf on a rocky coast, and he felt as though he were lifting a tower. Quickly he shifted his hold, swung his enemy over his head and, ducking under, brought him down with a crash. The fight was over. There was a spasmodic movement of Walter's body for a moment, a fluttering of the eyelids and a twitching of the face, and then he lay still.

Martin stood panting and wiping the sweat and blood from his face on his sleeve. His heart was beating like a trip hammer; there seemed to be a weight on his chest, and he felt as though he would stifle. He looked down at the white face turned up to him, staring at it with dim eyes.

"Get up!" he panted hoarsely. "Don't play the baby." He pushed the body with his foot. "Get up and fight it out like a man," he cried, but a tone of fear came into his voice, for he saw that a pool of blood was gathering under Walter's head and his face had grown almost waxen. He dropped to his knees and ran his hand under the head and drew it out, all dabbled with blood. A strange fear seized his heart; a choking, awful fear. A chill crept over him and he gazed wildly about, but the woods were as silent as the grave.

"Good God!" he cried in tones of agony, "he's dead! I have killed him." He caught the body by the shoulders and shook it.

"Get up, damn you!" he almost shrieked. "Don't you hear me curse you?"

He arose and, seizing his hat, ran blindly and stum-



ing his enemy over his head, and brought him down with  
a crash  
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blingly to the river, where he filled the hat with water and brought it back. This he dashed into Walter's face and poured on his head. Then he remembered that when one faints, the head should be lowered, so he raised Walter's feet in his arms and held them so for a moment. Not a sigh and not a movement came from the body. The face lay before him, cold and pale, and the black hair was matted on the white forehead. The lips were parted as with a sneer. Martin let the feet down.

"Oh, you've whipped me, you've whipped me!" he sobbed and, turning away, fled blindly to his mare, where he jerked the bridle loose, scrambled into the saddle—how, he did not know—and with bare head and bloody face went dashing through the woods toward the road along which they had come. He entered it in a few moments and then, driving his heels into the mare's sides, went flying along toward the main road. There, as he dashed into it, he almost ran over a negro plodding slowly along toward Granville with a basket in his hand.

Martin threw the mare back on her haunches, and the negro made a wild leap to the side of the road.

"Good Gawd er mighty, Cap'n!" cried the frightened darcy, "whut is dey been er-doin' ter yer?"

Martin flung himself from the mare, snatched the basket from the negro's hand and threw it into the bushes.

"Here," he cried, "take this mare and go to Doctor Mitchell and tell him that Martin Wentworth says to come at once to this road and go down it until he reaches a big beech. If you can't find him, get Doctor

Turner. Don't breathe a word to any one else. There's a man down there who is badly hurt." He almost pushed the negro up on the mare's back. "Go, and I'll give you five dollars."

The frightened darky was astride the mare almost before he knew it. The message shot through his confused brain and he mumbled out a bewildered "yassuh," as his feet found the stirrups.

"Go!" cried Martin frantically, as the negro's heels rammed the spirited mare in the side. "Go like hell!"

He heard another frightened "yassuh," and in a moment the negro was gone and he soon heard him go thundering across the bridge. He turned and ran breathlessly back to where the body lay. This he found just as he had left it, with the cold sneer still on the lips. He regarded it wildly for a moment and then stooped as though to press the sneer away. As his fingers neared it he felt he could not bear to touch it, and drawing them quickly back, he began to walk up and down.

He had always looked upon Tiffin as his friend, and now he lay there dead; the cause of it all, he did not know. He walked up and down, wrung with anguish and despair; there seemed no hope. Once, in desperation, he was tempted to blow out his brains and picked up his pistol from where it had lain forgotten on the ground. Just at that moment he heard Doctor Mitchell calling from the road and, thrusting the pistol into his pocket and drawing on his coat, he ran quickly to the beech to lead the way back. The strange negro was there with his mare, and he ordered him to wait. The negro looked at him in a frightened way and stam-

mered out his "yassuh" once more. As they turned away he cleared his throat and whispered to Martin in an awed tone:

"Cap'n, is dey anybody daid?"

Martin turned on him fiercely, but Doctor Mitchell's call attracted his attention, and he hurried through the woods to the spot where the fight had taken place. Doctor Mitchell walked up to the body, glanced at it for an instant and an exclamation of surprise broke from his lips. He turned accusing eyes on Martin and they seemed to reach his very soul. He felt a sense of being wronged, and a feeling of hopelessness slipped over him. They would all take it that way, he was thinking.

"I threw him," he said brokenly.

The doctor dropped on his knees and caught hold of Walter's wrist. Then he unbuttoned the vest, the coat having been torn open, and placed his ear to the breast. At last he rose with a sigh of relief. Martin could see it flutter on his lips; he was Walter's friend. And what was he? An alien! A "damned Yankee!" And they would all be against him.

"He's alive, thank God!" said Doctor Mitchell, "but I don't know just how badly he's hurt."

He felt of the head and, finding that the skull was not fractured, set to work to restore Walter to consciousness. He arose and, drawing out a note-book, wrote some words on a piece of paper, and, tearing it out, gave it to Martin.

"Hand that to the nigger and tell him to take it to my stable and bring my phaeton back with him."

Martin seized it and hurried with it to the negro, who



received the note and instructions without a word and went galloping up the road.

When Martin returned, he found Doctor Mitchell kneeling by the body. He had been administering something from his medicine case, and as Martin drew near he heard a groan issue from Walter's lips. That to him, for the moment, was the sweetest sound he had ever heard, and a gladness came into his heart, and with it a hope that his enemy was to live. Doctor Mitchell made as thorough an examination as was possible under the circumstances, and to Martin's query replied: "I think he is simply stunned, but I can not tell yet. Hurts like that frequently turn out badly. It will take some time to learn the extent of his injuries."

Martin wandered back to the road and sat down to wait for the coming of the phaeton. His head was in a whirl, and he was so exhausted he could hardly stand on his feet. When it came, he found that the negro had left his mare in town and brought only the phaeton, stating that the mare would not be led.

"Wash your face and go to your office," directed Doctor Mitchell. "You may take my horse. This negro can ride to town on Walter's horse, and I will have him return your mare. Walter is all right now, and I don't want you here."

Martin did as he was bidden, and rode with a heavy heart and a weary body to the offices. Fortunately, he met no one on the way, and he at once turned the horse into the lot and, entering the house through a side way, he made his way to his room, and dropped wearily on his bed.

*Once he rose and examined the condition of his face.*

It was fearfully bruised, his lips were cut and swollen, his nose looked twisted, and one eye was entirely closed. He lay down again and waited. After a while some one knocked at his door; it seemed but a few minutes, but it had in fact been more than two hours, as he had fallen asleep through sheer exhaustion. He opened the door an inch or so and, placing his good eye at the crack, saw the negro whom he had sent for the doctor.

"Cap'n," said the negro, "I done fotch yo' mare back, an' here's some writin' whut de doctor sont."

The negro handed him a note, and he quickly tore it open and read:

"Mr. Wentworth:

I send your mare by the bearer hereof. He will bring my horse back with him. Mr. Tiffin has regained consciousness and informs me that he was thrown in a wrestling match. I may say that I see no reason why he should not be entirely well in a few days.

LLOYD MITCHELL, M. D."

Martin handed the negro five dollars, as he had promised, and then, remembering that he had gone on other errands since, he handed him an extra dollar.

"Horse is in the lot; bridle and saddle there, too. Put my mare up and take the horse back," he muttered.

"Cap'n," said the negro in a solemn whisper, and as earnestly as though the fate of many lives hung upon his silence, "I ain't tol' nairy soul. 'Fo' Gawd I ain't tol' hit, an' I ain't er gwineter tell hit, nuther. You kin 'pen' on me ter de las' notch."

Martin thanked him, and then, closing the door, lay down to wonder, to regret, and to be very thankful.

## CHAPTER XII

### A BOUQUET OF ROSES

During the next few days Martin was very busy. He had but little time to devote to himself, and it was only when each day's work was over that he became restless and dissatisfied. The bruises were slowly passing from his face, the swelling had disappeared, and most of his stiffness and soreness was gone, but there remained one great black spot under his left eye that shaded away to purple and then edged off into bluish green. Bathe it and anoint it as he would, it stayed and stayed, and seemed to his anxious eyes as if it would never disappear. He had had a green shade made to wear over it, and few people had seen the bruise. Many imagined he was suffering from some eye trouble.

There was a negro boy about eighteen years old who worked at the offices. His duties consisted in looking after the cleanliness of the building, carrying messages and caring for the horses that belonged to the officers of the company. He was to make himself generally useful about the building, and, as he seemed to be honest and was fairly industrious, Martin had taken a fancy to him, and the negro looked up to him as his sole master and employer.

The negro had said that his name was "Ase," but

whether that was an abbreviation or not Martin never knew.

"Hit's des natchelly mer name," he had said. "I dunno ef hit's fer short er no."

Ase was one of the first to learn of the condition of his master's face, and, strange to say, he had not said a word, nor had he gazed at it a second time. He turned his eyes away after the first startled glance and went about his duties as usual. Later in the day Martin had taken the negro into his confidence to a certain extent, and the bruise had been exhibited for his inspection. During the days that followed, Ase had brought many mysterious brews and stews made by negro women who lived in the neighborhood, and Martin had tried several of them, but without effect.

One afternoon, when the day's work was over, Martin took his seat on the veranda and prepared himself for a long, comforting pull at his pipe. As he sat smoking, he suddenly thought of a similar afternoon, now long gone, when he had sat in almost the same spot, quite as discontented and unhappy. This time there was no party to go to and no girls to meet, but the fact that he could not see these same girls, and had to stay from town on account of his eye, made him extremely miserable.

As he sat wondering what they must think since he came no more, two negroes who worked at the mill opened the little gate and, mounting the steps, doffed their hats politely.

"Good ebenin', Cap'n! How is yer dis ebenin'?" asked the one who stood in front and whose name was Dick.

"Oh, I am fairly well," was the reply. "What can I do for you?"

The negro scratched his head slowly for a moment, as though undecided how to proceed. He followed this up with a broad grin. This seemed to give him courage, and he looked around at his companion, whose name was Joe. Joe promptly took up the grinning and then chuckled as though the two were about to impart some information that was exceedingly funny.

"Here!" cried Martin impatiently. "What do you want? Break up that grinning match and speak out."

"Cap'n Wentwuth," said Dick, trying to look serious, "de presidint sont us ter yer ter ax yer 'bout sump'n."

"Well, tell me what it is," replied Martin.

"Yer know," said Dick, who seemed to be the spokesman, "us niggers here at de mill, us doan' lib right strickly in Granville."

"Of course you don't," he replied. "You live nearly a mile from Granville."

"Dat's des whut us wuz er-sayin' ter de presidint," continued Dick earnestly, "an' he 'low he so busy dat he ain't got no time ter fool wid us, an' so he say fer us ter come ter you, an' des whuteber you do 'bout hit, dat be all right wid him an' de comp'ny."

"What have I got to do with the mill being a mile from Granville?" asked Martin impatiently. "I can't help it. What are you trying to tell me, anyway?"

"Wall," burst out Dick, his diplomacy shattered, "us is er kermittee. Dat's whut us is, ain't us, Joe?"—turning to his companion for a verification of his statement.

Joe bowed his head vigorously. "Umph-humph," he replied, as he squirted a lot of tobacco juice into the yard, "kermittee,—dat's right; dat's whut us sho' is!"

"Whom do you represent and what do you want?"

"Wall," said Dick slowly, "us is er kermittee f'um de mill niggers. Yer know dey is erbout eighty-odd niggers whut wu'ks at dis here mill, an' den dere is all de wimmens an' de chilluns, an' so us 'lowed dat ef yer doan' keer, us gwineter hab us er chutch."

"Of course I don't care," said Martin. "Have your church."

"Yassuh, thank yer, boss," said Joe, bowing.

Here Dick took up his head-scratching again, and the grin appeared once more on his face.

"Whut us wants ter know," he said slowly, "is sorter 'bout de spot. Us ain't gwineter hab no strickly reg'lar chutch."

"What kind of a church do you intend to have, if it is not to be a regular church?" asked Martin.

"Wall, I'll tell yer de whole trufe now, bein' ez how yer done axed me," said Dick. "Hit's de wimmens whut wants de chutch, an' us mens, us is gwineter git up er sorter s'iety an' kinder buck some er dese here fool young niggers. Us is gwineter buil' tergedder, an' so us 'lowed dat yer mout sorter gib us dat little islan' up de ribber, whar de creek runs in. Hit's des erbout er little mo' den er acre, an' ain't fitten fer nothin' nohow,—seppen sump'n nother 'bout lak dat."

"Why," exclaimed Martin in surprise, "that is nearly as far as Granville. Why don't you build closer?"

"Dat's clost ernuff," said Dick; "an' den, too, hit'll

be our'n. Us kin buil' er little bridge crost the creek an' den nobody can't pester de s'iety bewhilst dey is wu'kin' ; kin dey, Joe?"

"Naw, suh," responded Joe emphatically, "dey sho can't, an' us doan' 'pose to hab no fool niggers whut ain't got nothin' ter do wid de s'iety er-usin' roun' an' peepin' inter de knot-holes."

Martin considered the matter for some moments. It would indeed be a good thing for these negroes to have a church of their own if they wanted it, and the company really ought to help them.

"Who is going to preach for you?" he asked.

"Pahson Green," was the prompt reply. "Yassuh, Pahson Green, he gwineter do de preachin'."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Martin at last. "We will give you twenty-five dollars in money and the lumber, rough lumber, mind you, and let you use the island."

"Thank yer, sir," they said together, "us'll do de buildin' all right."

The negroes started down the steps and out of the gate, when they began to laugh and slap each other on the back.

"Come back," called Martin. "I want to tell you something."

They turned and looked at him expectantly.

"I do not intend to allow you men to abuse any of the younger darkies," he said. "If that is what your society is for, why, you can't have it anywhere on the mill property."

"Naw, sir, naw, sir," said Dick with an anxious face. "Us ain't er gwineter do dat. Dey gwineter 'bleedged

ter be willin' 'fo' dey kin jine, an' atter dat dey be des ez big Ike ez de balance."

"All right," he said warningly, "but if I hear of any complaints about your society, I shall have to put a stop to it here on the mill property, anyway. You darkies get good wages and have good homes here, and I don't want to see you get up trouble among yourselves."

"I promise yer," said Dick solemnly, "dat all de niggers whut gits inter de s'iety is gwineter be good frien's. Hit's des for 'musemints, an' dat's all."

The following day was Saturday, and when the mill closed down for the day, the payment of the hands had to be looked after. Each man's time had been given in at the commissary, where his purchases were checked over and he was paid the amount due him.

Martin despatched Ase to Granville for the mail, as usual, and, his own work being finished, he wandered down toward the public road and sat down on a log.

Numbers of negroes passed him on their way to town. Laughing and chatting, they trudged gaily along the dusty road to part with their last cent. Granville was the Mecca for all, and they, pilgrims of imppecuniosity, earnest devotees of waste, carried their few dollars as heavily, as uneasily and as hurriedly as the accumulated prayers of the faithful are hastened to the Shrine to be deposited there that the heart may be light once more. It was a polite "Good ebenin', boss," or "Howdy, Cap'n," as each passed him.

He sat thinking of their future, their past and their present condition. Happy they were, careless and seemingly contented. There was not one among the



number who might not, by the savings from two or three years' labor, have owned his own home, together with sufficient arable land from which to support himself and the members of his family for the rest of their days in comfort and, indeed, with plenty. With the memory of the old slavery days or the ideas that their parents had handed down to them still governing them, they cared nothing for the morrow, because in the other days that care was their master's alone. They worked at the mill with no white men at their side; there was no competition between the races; and so there could, if reason governed, only be peace.

Martin sat for a long while thinking over the problem, but in the end he reached no conclusion. Things were working smoothly enough in that little corner of the world,—therefore, why worry?

At last he rose and, walking slowly along through the gathering gloom, he thought and wondered what would be the end of it all. The subject would not leave his mind.

"I am glad that the mill negroes are taking to the church idea, anyway," he thought. "The preacher, Aaron Green, is an educated man and a smart man. Mentally he is about the highest type of the race, and we shall see what he can do for them. *By their fruits ye shall know them*, and I shall keep my eye open for developments."

Far across the river a lonely whippoorwill was calling, leather-wing bats circled and zigzagged over his head, and down the road behind him he heard the voices of some of the negroes returning from Granville. He entered the little gate, and just as his foot

struck the bottom step on his way into the offices he heard some one calling him. Turning, he saw the boy Ase riding up with the mail. The darky swung from the horse, dropped the rein over a picket and entered the gate. Martin took from his hands some letters and a pasteboard box, from which the odor of roses escaped. Ase then searched through his pockets for a moment and finally handed out a note.

"I wuz des loafin' wid Dema fer er minute er two," he explained, "an' us walked up ter Cap'n Brantley's. Dere whar she stayin' now, bein' ez how she done quit out ter de Traylor place. She 'low hit's too fur f'um town. Miss Jessie an' Miss Ferginia wuz er-settin' on de po'ch, an' Miss Jessie she called me, an' bofe dem ladies sont dem,"—pointing to the note and the box.

"She axed me how yer wuz er-gittin' on," continued the negro, as his master stood looking over the letters.

A flush spread over Martin's face. So, after all, they had found it out, and the roses were sent as a mark of their sympathy. His face grew crimson at the thought. He had let a smaller man than he was pummel his face until it was almost unrecognizable, and now they were sending him roses. It was a little too much!

"What did you tell her?" he asked at last.

"I 'lowed dat yer wuz sorter po'ly right now, but dat I wuz bou<sup>n</sup>' dat dey cudden nothin' hol' yer down long."

Martin continued to examine the letters.

"She an' Miss Ferginia bofe axed whut wuz de matter."

"What did you tell them?" he asked again.

"Wall, Cap'n," said Ase, visibly disturbed as to what the consequences of his speech might be, "I dunno ef I done right er no, but I tol' dem two young ladies dat yer had er sorter heavy tetch er chill an' fevers ter my notion."

Martin turned to ascend the stairs, then paused, and, with a sense of gratitude toward the negro, reached into his pocket and gave Ase half a dollar. The negro regarded it mournfully.

"Wisht I had er had dat when I wuz in town," he said.

"Why," exclaimed Martin in astonishment, "have you already spent your money?"

"Yassuh," admitted Ase reluctantly, "I ain't got nairy Susan lef' ter mer name."

"What did you do with it all?" asked Martin impatiently.

"Wall," whined Ase, "I is got er ginger-cake gal name Vi'let in town, an' she knowed dat hit wuz Sat'-day, an' dere she wuz when I rid up. I knowed er-fo'han' dat she gwineter be er-settin' dere, an' I had orter lef' mer money here, but des lak er fool I got rope' in an' got skunt outen hit all seppen er dollar an' six bits."

"What did you buy for her?" queried Martin, who had now become interested in the story of Ase's woes.

"Wall," said Ase, "las' Sat'day I lef mer money here an' seppen whut I tuk up at de commissary, I had two weeks' wedges wid me dis time. De fus' thing she made me buy wuz some shoes an' whut dey go wids."

"You mean stockings?" asked Martin, with a smile.

"Yassuh, dat's dem. She 'low dat she knockin'

roun' mighty nigh on her uppers. Den she see er umbrel' an' some blue year-bobs, an' in co'se she gwineter monkey wid dem, an' dat fool nigger Bob at de sto' he had done wropped um up an' gib um ter her fo' yer cu'd say scat, an' I hatter h'ist up de stuff ter settle de bill. Den de balance hit got used up wid knickknacks, seppen dat dollar an' six bits. I had dat an' swo' dat mer money wuz all gone."

"What did you do with the dollar and six bits?"

"I shuck mer gal when Dema called me."

"What became of the money?"

"Me an' Dema, us spent er quarter at ernudder sto'," he said, with a tremor in his voice.

"How about the rest of it?"

"I run ercrost Dick, an' I owed it ter him, an' he made me pay up."

"Craps?" asked Martin.

"Yassuh," with a tearful gulp.

Martin regarded him for a moment in silence.

"What do you intend to do with the fifty cents I gave you just now, Ase?" he asked.

Ase hesitated for an instant and then burst out desperately:

"Ef yer doan' keer, Cap'n, I des 'lowed dat I'd git me er scooter-top flask er corn sperrits an' git bilin' drunk ter-night."

Martin looked at him for a moment in disgust.

"You are a derved fool, Ase," he said as he turned and mounted the steps.

"Yassuh, Cap'n," exclaimed the negro broken-heartedly, as he stared at his master's back, "I reckon yer 'bout right."

Then he went slowly out of the yard to put up the horse. He stumbled over a pig that was lying grunting against the lot fence, and, turning, kicked it viciously, and then went on about his business, swearing softly to himself, bowed and broken beneath the burden of his woes.

In his room Martin opened the box and found a mass of yard-grown roses,—late-flowering ones they were, but beautiful and very fragrant. He read the note that accompanied them sadly and with many regrets, and then turned to the mirror and gazed at his damaged eye; it was hopeless. They were going to Mobile on Monday, and would be gone for about ten days. Sunday they would be at the Traylor plantation, and he was invited to dine there. Virginia and Jessica both signed the note.

Martin wrote a reply, thanking them for the roses, and declined the invitation, alleging that he had not been entirely well for some days. He also expressed great regret at not being able to see them before they should go away. Then he called Ase and gave him the note. The negro fingered it for a moment.

“Kin I shine yer Sunday shoes ’fo’ I go?” he asked at last.

“Why?” asked Martin.

“I mout not be here rale soon, an’ I done made ’rangemints wid Aunt Sallie’s boy ter do de cleanin’ up an’ feed de stock.”

“You can be gone the whole day to-morrow if you want to,” said Martin. “I am not going to need you, and Aunt Sallie can clean up the offices after breakfast. The president is going to leave in the morning

anyway, and so it don't make any difference for one day."

Ase still lingered.

"Hurry up with that note," said Martin. "I want you to take it to town just as soon as you eat supper. There will not be a reply."

"Yassuh, I'm fixin' fer ter git ready fer to go right now. I doan' keer 'bout no supper. I'm full er ginger-cake an' stuff whut I et up town, an' I is so fusticated dat I ain't got no tas'e fer no vittles nohow."

"Well, go ahead with the note, then."

Ase stood turning his hat in his hands.

"Cap'n," he said hesitatingly, "reckin yer cudden sorter loan me 'bout fo' bits? I pay yer sho certain nex' Sat'day."

Martin gave him the money, made a note of it on a bit of paper and put it on his desk. Ase grinned for a minute and then said, in a low and confidential tone:

"I is gwineter git me dat liquor an' er good hick'ry stick an' fin' out perzackly how me an' Vi'let stan's. Palaver doan' count wid me no mo'."

"Oh, go on out and carry that note," said Martin. "You had better let that girl alone; she will get every cent you make, and will get you into trouble, besides."

Ase went softly out and started down the road. Frogs without number were croaking in the direction of the river, and from the negro mill settlement came the barking of many dogs. He looked up at the stars as he walked along, and determination came into his face. His brow was wrinkled with a purpose.

"Dey is one thing, sho certain," he muttered solemnly, "de settlemint, hit lays betwixt de doctor an' de

preacher, an' dat nigger is got ter do de choosin'. She kin des do airy one she wants ter, but dey is sho gwinter be er-choosin' dis Gawd's bery night."

Then he gripped the note firmly in one hand and his stick in the other, and soon disappeared in the darkness of the woods on the road toward Granville.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE CURSE OF WILSON HARTLEY

In the late afternoon of a beautiful autumn day in the early seventies, some twenty years before the events of the preceding chapters, a young man was walking rapidly down one of the principal streets of Macon, Georgia, in deep agitation. Many people were hurrying in the opposite direction, and they stared at him with curious interest as they passed by.

He stopped suddenly and called to the driver of a public conveyance standing near. The negro cut the vehicle close to the sidewalk and, springing down, lifted his hat politely.

"Yo' office, Mister Ogletree?" he asked.

"No, my room," answered the young man, as he stepped in and closed the door. The negro mounted the box and the vehicle started off with a whirl, while the occupant sank back in the seat and covered his pale face with trembling hands.

"My God!" he muttered between his teeth. "I wouldn't have had it happen for anything,—*anything!*"

In a short while the negro pulled the horses up before a house. He sprang from his seat, caught a coin that was tossed to him, and then stood for a moment



with awe in his eyes, staring after the form of the young man, who entered the gate and hurried into the dwelling.

“Dat knocked him out,” mumbled the darky. “Yasir, dat’s de bery fus’ time, but de young lawyer wid de lightnin’ an’ de honey in his mouf is sho done tuk dat ter heart.”

The young man closed the outer door and mounted the stairs to his room. There he dropped into a rocker and sat aimlessly mopping his forehead. Suddenly he tossed his handkerchief on the floor and buried his face in his hands. The tears came to his eyes, and he swayed his head from side to side and ground his teeth.

“He has ruined me,” he muttered. “Utterly ruined me!”

William Jared Ogletree, for this was the young man’s name, had come to Macon some two years before from another portion of the state. He was of slender build, indeed almost frail, and had an open, boyish face and soft clear blue eyes. While he was of an exceedingly modest and unassuming disposition, he had nevertheless forged rapidly to the front, for he was what, in this day and time, people are pleased to call a “spellbinder”; and yet he was something more than this.

But a short time before he had been employed to assist in the prosecution of a wealthy planter named Wilson Hartley, who had been indicted for the murder of one Fannie McLain, a young girl of eighteen, whom he had brought but a year before from her home somewhere in South Carolina. The trial had ended

most tragically on that day, and this it was that had so unnerved young Ogletree.

Of motive for the killing, the State in the prosecution had been able to prove enough and to spare. Hartley had wanted to be rid of the girl. That was fully shown by a pathetic yet threatening letter which she had written to him, the torn pieces of which had been found in the fireplace in his room. The evidence against him as to the actual commission of the murder, however, was entirely circumstantial.

So far as the testimony showed, the girl had last been seen at the post-office about six o'clock on the afternoon, when she had posted a letter. About ten o'clock that same evening her body was found lying under a clump of willows on the banks of the Ockmulgee River, some three miles from the town, with a stab-wound in her breast.

Hartley had filed a plea of not guilty to the charge as contained in the indictment, and his special defense was an alibi. He claimed to have gone to his plantation, about eight miles in the country, with a number of friends, played cards that evening, and on the following morning gone hunting.

When the defense closed, young Ogletree whispered for some moments with the prosecuting attorney, and then began his argument in behalf of the State. It was the first time in his life he had assisted in a prosecution, and many wondered just how he would take hold and how he would proceed. He did not keep them waiting long. Carefully, and without once being dull, he reviewed the testimony that had been presented, and then he launched forth upon an argument, both

upon the law and the facts, such as had rarely if ever been equaled and surely never excelled in the history of the good old county of Bibb.

There had never been anything of staginess or posing in his manner. Men forgot his youth in the virility of the utterances that seemed to come from the very fountain-head of sincerity, justice and truth. He was simply one who understood the passions, the prejudices and the nobler emotions of men's hearts, and, in language that was earnest, beautiful and striking, drew upon them as the warp through which he threaded the woof of the testimony that made up his case. He seldom, in his arguments, made a direct plea to the jury, but when he did, it was in language so startling and powerful that he often swept them from the anchor of calm deliberation and carried them away with him almost before they were aware. Men could hardly understand how he did it, but there was never a straining to follow him, and he did not seem to try to persuade. He seemed to furnish both the mirror and the reflection, and the particular passion or conviction adjusted itself to the thing that represented it and settled itself stably, and the juror felt that Ogletree had but voiced a thought or a feeling that was already his own. It was, in truth, a system of hypnotic bullyragging that made men follow when they seemed to lead; that made them claim and accept thoughts that had not been theirs, for he seemed to argue from them rather than to them.

On that day, when young Ogletree began to speak, Wilson Hartley was sitting with his elbows resting on the table in front of him and an unconcealed sneer on

his lips. He had full confidence in the testimony he had offered to make out his alibi; his attorneys were all able men, and, besides and above all else, there were two jurors in the box, neither of whom, he felt certain, would convict under any circumstances.

It was but a little while, however, after the argument began, before the sneer slipped from the prisoner's face, and his star witnesses sat red-faced and angry as the speaker picked their testimony to pieces.

Leaving these witnesses at last, to their evident relief, he began to sting and lash the prisoner without pity and without mercy. His eyes glowed and burned with the fire that was in him. Up and down, up and down he walked before the jury, gazing into each man's eye and putting each juror upon the rack as the blast of convincing eloquence seemed to sear and seethe about him alone.

Finally his voice fell and the outburst ceased. He produced the letter that Fannie McLain had written to Hartley, and which had been offered in evidence, and began to read it:

"So this is to be the end of it all, you say, and I am to go away," she had written. "I have been thinking of my old home to-day, Wilson, and I feel that I can not bear it all much longer; it is killing me. I have nothing to do but just to sit and think, think, think, until my brain reels and I feel that I shall go mad. I haven't a God to pray to any more, for I haven't dared to pray, not even to think of a prayer, for so long, so awfully long.

"You came to me when I had everything,—youth, strength, health and happiness,—and now you have left

me with nothing but heartaches and the ashes of all that God made good in the world. Do you know how it tastes, this Dead Sea fruit, Wilson? If you did, you would not give it to me to eat, dear; I know you would not; I swear you would not. You want to be rid of me now, and I tell you, Wilson Hartley, that when you give me back my God and the forgiveness of my God, then I will go.

"I sat at my window last night and thought over it all. Then I looked up at the stars, and I knew how little and lonely and wicked I am and have been. Oh, Wilson, I can't bear it by myself, for I am so afraid.

"Do you think for a moment you are doing me right? You, whom I have loved so long, and whom I used to honor so?

"Oh, Wilson, Wilson Hartley, when I die, I am going to tell God on you. He will let me stay for perhaps just a little while, and I will hide my face and tell Him. It won't be a nice story to tell, either, Wilson, and I think He will be sorry for me a little, and will let me slip away somewhere where I can lie down and be nothing, nothing, for ever and for ever.

"No, I won't, Wilson; no, I won't. You know I won't. I shall lie for you and take it all.

"Oh, Wilson, I can't bear it by myself. You are so big and strong, and I feel somehow that it will work out all right in the end, and then, Wilson, maybe I can forget. But, please, don't forsake me; please don't, for I can hurt you. Oh, how I can hurt you—and I will do it, too!

"I don't want your money; I want you. I shall be mad soon; as mad as the maddest loon that ever raved,

and I will shriek your name from the court-house door if you don't come back to me. Few people know now, but I don't care what happens. I don't care. If I had not believed and trusted in you, I would never have had this cup of bitterness handed to me to drink, and, Wilson, I can not drink it alone. Oh, Wilson, how could you, how could you? Please come back to me. You *must* reply."

Ogletree folded the letter in his hand and, turning, gazed intently at the prisoner's face, and repeated in a voice brimming with pathos: "Oh, Wilson, Wilson Hartley, when I die, I am going to tell God on you. He will let me stay, perhaps, a little while, and I will hide my face and tell Him."

Had he prepared it himself, he could have wanted nothing better than this letter, and with it he pursued the prisoner until the flush of shame passed from Hartley's face and he grew pale. He bowed his head, and, taking up a pencil, began with trembling fingers to make meaningless marks on a sheet of paper that lay upon the table before him.

Gradually shifting his theme, the young lawyer began in gentle and almost conversational tones to speak of Fannie McLain, who had lived there among them as a respectable woman. He spoke of her life, her love and her fearful death. Back in the court-room somewhere a woman sobbed; men gazed out of the windows, so that others might not see their eyes, and a single tear trickled undisturbed down the cheek of a gray-haired juror. Breaths that were drawn were quivering with emotion, and there was a tightening of the features of many a man who heard the beautiful

tribute paid to woman, whether she be high or low, good and virtuous, or beyond recall,—woman, who suffers not for her sins alone, but for all the sins of men, and who never falls so low but she must still eat the bread of self-sacrifice.

Some of the jurors prayed in their hearts that he would leave the subject. They almost wished he would slash and flay Wilson Hartley again. They could listen to that with at least some measure of composure, whether they believed he deserved it or not; but this gentle, velvet-like voice, whose every intonation was filled with a pathos that sunk into their hearts as it recounted the sad, sad story, made them rebel. They hated themselves for a display of emotion, and an anger began to stir in them against Wilson Hartley. Whether he had murdered Fannie McLain or not, he had been more than inhuman to her and was the primal cause of the emotional agony with which their hearts were now being wrung. Glances of enmity and almost hatred were directed toward him and he saw them and felt them and the hand of an awful fear grasped his throat. The jury was drifting, drifting, drifting, like the tide going out to sea.

The speaker gradually changed his theme and his tone. He was about to close, and he did not dare leave the jury or any of its members with hearts softened to pity by the pathetic story. Some of them had been brought to the point where they felt almost a personal wrong in the wrongs that had been done to Fannie McLain, but pity was in their hearts, and pity sometimes widens to cast its protecting mantle over the just and unjust alike. He meant to steel them against

pity and harden their hearts against the prisoner, to the end that cold, unwavering justice might be done.

Suddenly a woman came hurrying through the court-room. A deputy tried to stop her, but she evaded his clutches and made her way to the speaker and handed him a note. A flush of vexation overspread his face at the interruption, but she stepped close to him and whispered for a moment in his ear. After directing a look of hatred toward the prisoner, she stood panting with exhaustion and waiting until Ogletree should open and read what she had brought. The envelop was torn and, as the young lawyer drew out the note, every eye in the court-room was fastened upon it. His back was half-turned toward Wilson Hartley, who now sat erect in his chair, his eyes glued upon the paper and his face ghastly white. Ogletree unfolded the sheet and began to glance over it. It was a most unusual thing to do, and neither judge, jury nor spectators could understand why he should do it. Suddenly there was a hoarse cry of rage and fear,—the table was overturned with a crash and the prisoner sprang upon him and endeavored to seize the paper. Ogletree swerved to one side, nearly falling from the force of the contact. Men started to their feet all over the room and there was a rush toward the combatants. "Give it to me, you devil!" shrieked Hartley, striking a fearful blow at his prosecutor. Ogletree ducked quickly, but was hurled back against the crowd. He stuffed the note into his pocket and, as the prisoner followed him, he struck the man twice in the face. The sheriff was trying to fight his way through the crowd toward the two men. The judge shouted for order



and delivered commands to deputies, who never heard them. The combatants had gone down to the floor and the sound of wild oaths, of the tearing of clothes and of muttered imprecations rose from the tangle where several men now lay turning and twisting in a flesh-bruising, bone-breaking struggle.

At last the sheriff and his deputies reached the spot and separated them. The prisoner was jerked loose, but he had run amuck and was fighting the world. Every man was his enemy. He turned quickly and knocked the sheriff down with a fierce blow in the face. Half a dozen men tried to grapple with him, but his muscles seemed made of steel and he slung them loose like chaff. "Let me have it, let me have it!" he shrieked. The sheriff had drawn his revolver and as Hartley sprang upon him in an endeavor to secure it, there was a struggle and a few muttered curses. Hartley was the stronger man and was tearing the weapon from the officer's hands when there was a quick report. "Damn you, damn you!" howled the prisoner and staggered back. His eyes fell upon Ogletree, who had endeavored to assist the sheriff, and he tried to seize him by the throat. Ogletree struck him a quick hard blow and he whirled and fell sprawling upon the floor.

The whole court-room was in a wild uproar and, with the sound of the shot, many plunged through the crowd and hurled themselves toward the door. It was for a few moments an utter stampede, but the larger portion of the crowd soon poured out. Hartley was carried to a jury-room and there laid on the floor and some one called for a physician. There was



“ You, you,” he gurgled; “ I curse you !”

moments the doctor fingered the man's wrist, cut open his shirt and placed his ear to the sweaty breast. He listened carefully, and then rising to his feet, said simply: "He's gone."

On that day young Ogletree's name was on every tongue in the city. After he had regained a certain measure of composure at his room, he returned to his office and many members of the bar came there to congratulate him upon his great speech, but he declined their congratulations.

"The jury would most certainly have convicted on that speech," they said.

"Possibly so," he replied. "I can not tell what they would have done, but I wouldn't have had that killing take place for anything in the world. I haven't the heart to shake anybody's hand over it."

That night when he went to his room, he sat for a long time thinking over the events of the day. He was satisfied with his speech and felt there was really more in him than even he himself had ever dreamed. He drew a chair to the window and looked out into the night and up at the sky. The words of the letter came to him.

"I sat at my window last night and looked up at the stars, and I knew how little and lonely and wicked I am and have been!" He stirred restlessly and a shiver passed over him.

"Oh, Wilson, Wilson Hartley, when I die, I am going to tell God on you! He will let me stay perhaps just a little while, and I will hide my face and tell Him."

The words of the letter and of his speech seemed

to be burned and seared into his brain. He could not forget them. He tried to think of other things, of his old home, of a little girl he loved once when a boy. A dozen things came to his mind and he tried to fasten it on them, but always between, as though whispered by some unseen being, came the words: "When I die, Wilson, I am going to tell God on you. He will let me stay for just a little while, and I will hide my face and tell Him, Wilson."

He tried to break into the line of thought that followed the sentence out, but could not do it. When once his mind began with it, it must go through to the end.

"Good Lord!" he murmured as he rose from the chair, "the plagued thing is haunting me." Then a thought struck him and a cold fear gripped his heart.

"He cursed me," he muttered. "It was the curse of a dying man that I might suffer what he had been through."

Suddenly he laughed and sat down once more by the window.

"I'm a fool," he muttered. "I am just wrought up from the nervous tension. It's silly to think of things like that. A little more experience will harden me to it."

He gazed out into the night and again it passed through his mind like a ghostly procession of words coming in from the mystical darkness.

"When I die, Wilson, I am going to tell God on you. He will let me stay for just a little while, and—"

Ogletree sprang from his chair, struck cold by a fearful horror.

"Great God!" he cried, "am I going to be this way always? I'll go mad as a March hare."

He hurried out of the room, his face white and quivering and went to the room of a young clerk near his own. He felt weak and faint and remembered he had eaten very little supper. He had had no desire for food.

"Oh, John," he cried, knocking on the door.

"Come in," called his friend.

He opened the door and stepped into the room.

"I'm sick, I think," he said. "I feel faint and weak. Have you any whisky?"

His friend took a bottle from a small cupboard and handed it to him.

"Are you suffering any pain? You are as white as a sheet."

"No, I'm just sick all over. I feel queer and nervous and weak. I think the excitement of the trial was a little too much for me."

He took the bottle and gulped down several swallows from a goblet into which he had poured some of the whisky. The color came back to his face and he rose to go.

"You had better take it with you," urged his friend. "I don't need it, but you had better take it with you and use it if you feel bad again. You looked as if the devil had been after you a while ago, and you scared me at first."

Ogletree took the bottle to his room and, after taking one more drink, went to bed and soon fell asleep.

It was not long after the trial in the Hartley case before considerable business began to come to the

young lawyer. His ready eloquence and his biting sarcasm were in great demand, but he refused to prosecute in any more cases; he would only defend.

"I have had enough of that," he would say. "I don't want any more of it. I had rather quit the practice."

With the coming of success, a change seemed to take place in him. The old timidity had passed away and in its stead self-confidence crept in and he felt and knew every strand and measure of his ability. There was nothing of egotism in his speech nor in his manner. It was simply the force and power in the man that yearned and sought for conflict in the trial of causes that were worth while. He became quickly the master of the bar before a jury, and was always listened to with interest. As time passed, a nervousness and an eagerness began to grow upon him which exhausted his vital forces, and, in moments of excitement, he burned as with a fever.

One night as he was leaving the court-room after a particularly fiery and passionate speech, an older attorney who had been associated with him in the case remarked upon it.

"Look here, Ogletree," he said. "You are getting keyed up a little too high. I never heard such a blast of irony, sarcasm and abuse in my life. You ought to tone down. You would have made a dog sorry for that fellow Richfield. You are getting more and more that way and you ought to quit it. You hurt your cause by it."

Ogletree stood for a moment, fanning himself with his hat.

"I can't help it," he said. "God! man, you don't know what I go through with. I am battling, battling all the time. I have to keep it down, but in a case like that I can turn myself loose and it helps me for a week."

"What are you battling with?" inquired the other lawyer.

"God only knows; I don't. All I know is that every nerve of my body is strung for battle all the time and every cell of my brain is quivering with excitement, and I am getting so I can hardly sleep."

"You ought to take a rest," was the reply.

To this he offered no response. He simply shrugged his shoulders and the two continued on their way.

At last, to feed the yearning for excitement that was in his veins, the young man began to gamble. It amounted to little at first, but it grew upon him so rapidly that it became an all-absorbing passion with him, and he began to neglect his business.

He was sitting one night, in a room over a store, playing a heavy game of poker. Again and again he lost, just as he had lost before. The drinks continued to go round and the stakes became heavier and heavier. He had been a loser the night before, and now, in the hope that he might regain some of his losses, he asked that the limit be taken off the game. This was done, but luck still eluded him, and finally his last chip was swept in by a horse-dealer named T. Washington Burns.

"I'm out!" he said hoarsely. "Go on with the game. I'll watch it for a while and then go."

As the playing continued, he sat thinking of his

life in Macon, of the success that had come to him and of his fall. He owed debts he could not pay. He had borrowed from his bankers until they would lend him no more, and he was even in arrears for some months with the hotel where he lived. Now his last cent had just passed from him across the table. As he continued to watch the game, he continued to drink. At last he reached in his pocket for a cigar. He intended to light it and go, and at the same time he made up his mind to quit gambling for ever. As he felt in his pocket, his hand closed upon an envelop and he drew it out. With trembling fingers he pressed the edges so that it flared open at the end and he looked in on its contents. There were four hundred dollars in it; a client's money. He had forgotten to put it in his safe. The game went on and he fingered the envelop doubtfully, while temptation sang and sang in his ear and told him there lay the opportunity to win back every loss. He poured out another drink and tossed it down. A pot was swept in and he once more entered the game. He won two hundred dollars and hope whispered to him once more. Then he lost again and again, and finally there came a deal where only he and the man Burns stayed in. His brain was clouded from drink, but as he gazed intently upon the hand that had been dealt him, he felt that fortune had swung his way. Burns smiled as he always smiled when making a bluff or playing a good hand. No one could interpret his smile. Ogle-tree gazed into the man's eyes and a doubt swept over him like a shudder.

"Come on, my boy; don't be so slow; the night rolls



on apace," said Burns as he shifted his cigar, grasped it firmly between his teeth and squinted his eyes to keep out the smoke. Still Ogletree hesitated and a sickening fear crept over him. If he lost, he was done for. He had no way of repaying the money and more than half of it was already gone.

"Climb or tumble," said Burns.

Ogletree fingered his chips for a moment and then pushed them out before him. The show-down came and he lost. He rose from the table, his face as white as death. Suddenly a cry burst from his lips.

"You thief!" he shrieked, "you stole that eight of hearts from my discard."

Burns had been banking the game and had already laid a pile of bills upon the table intending to cash in the chips. When Ogletree shrieked out his charge of cheating the men sprang to their feet. The young lawyer made a quick movement with his left hand, and, seizing part of the pile of bills, rammed them into his pocket. There was a muttered curse and a blow. The lamp was overturned and went out. Chairs fell crashing to one side and the table was hurled against the wall. There was another curse and a blow in the darkness, and suddenly there came a flare of light and a deafening report, followed by a cry and a stumbling fall. Two of the men fled pell-mell from the room, and then out through the hall and down a back stairway crept William Jared Ogletree, a pistol in his hand and the echo of a loud report ringing in his ears.

When he reached the foot of the stairs, he turned from the little inclosure and crept out through an alley into another street. When he felt he was far enough

away from the scene of the trouble he began to run. There never came into his mind for one moment the thought of remaining. A great fear raced always behind him and he fled at the top of his speed toward the open country. All through the night he continued on his way, taking his route through fields and woods, wading down streams where it was possible and avoiding every habitation.

Night after night he continued his journey, and during the day he usually lay hidden in deep woods. One evening, as he was crossing a seldom-traveled road that wound its way through a thick swamp, he chanced upon a newspaper that had been tossed out from some passing vehicle. He picked it up, and sitting behind some bushes, began to run his eyes over its contents. There he saw the headlines of the story of the murder and just beneath it, in letters that seemed to change from blood-red to purple and from purple to blood-red again, he read the words: "The Curse of Wilson Hartley has Fastened Upon Him." He stared at the paper blankly for a moment and then, suddenly springing to his feet, he tore it into bits and stamped them into the ground. Then he fled wildly through the swamp, sobbing like a child.

His speech in the Hartley case followed him, and "I am going to tell God on you," was whispered during the night by every wind-blown tree and bush.

Sometimes he rolled face downward on the ground in a very frenzy of agony, but still there always came to him, when he grew quiet, the whispered words: "I am going to tell God on you, Wilson. I am going to tell God on you."

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE RESCUE

Along a pathway through thick woods in southeast Alabama a short while after young Ogletree's flight from Macon, a girl was making her way. The pathway was scarcely discernible to the unpractised eye, being simply a leaf and straw-covered thread of space that wound its course beneath great trees and between stunted undergrowth and tangles of vines. It was seldom broken, except where now and then the ancient and rotting trunk of a fallen tree formed an easy hurdle for a fleeing rabbit or a pursuing fox.

The girl never paused in doubt as to her course, but with quick noiseless feet, she passed lightly along, noting only here and there, in woman's way, some bright flower that appeared suddenly before her or some shy bird that, chancing upon her in its flight, turned with a frightened whir of wings and darted quickly out of sight.

She was about eighteen years of age; her hair and eyes were intensely black and her cheeks and lips revealed the health and strength that pulsed through her veins with every beat of her heart. The cool air of the woods was sweet with the fragrance of flowers and blossoming vines, and her full young bosom now

and then swelled to its limit as she drew it gratefully into her lungs. Not a sound escaped her lips, but the sparkle in her eyes, the glow in her cheeks and the quick movements of her lithe, strong body, showed she was radiant with life and happiness.

The girl wore a blue calico waist, and a skirt of the same material was gathered up about her hips so that it fell a little below her knees. At her back swung an old-fashioned poke-bonnet, which she had thrown from her head. It was now hanging by strings loosely knotted at her throat. She was barefoot.

For a long distance the girl continued steadily and silently on her way, but at last she paused upon the top of a straw-covered hill and gazed down toward a spot at its base, where a bold spring babbled from a clump of alders. She held a large bundle in her right hand, and, after standing for a moment in a mood of indecision, she grasped the bundle tightly, and, uttering a shout, ran down the hillside toward the spring with the speed of a deer.

As she slackened her speed upon nearing the bottom, a crashing noise issued from the alders and she halted suddenly with startled eyes and quick-beating heart, just as a man lurched from the bushes and staggered out before her, holding a pistol in his hand.

For an instant the blood fled from her cheeks and she stood for all the world like a frightened doe that is held momentarily immovable through the whirling, contrary thoughts of flight, woodcraft and desperate resistance.

The man, could he have been viewed in different circumstances, would have been an object to excite pity.

rather than to arouse fear. His hat lay in the bushes from which he had so suddenly emerged when startled by her glad shout as she sped down the hillside. His hair, which was long and unkempt, hung matted upon his forehead, and a growth of scraggly blond beard covered his cheeks and chin unevenly. His clothing was torn and soiled, and his shirt, which had once been fine and white, was now brown with sweat and dirt. His eyes were sunken, his cheeks were hollow, and his lips were almost bloodless.

For a moment, as they stood gazing at each other, a terrible fear shone in his blue eyes,—a fear that was strongly mixed with wild desperation. As he stared at the girl, who stood before him with quivering nostrils and quick-heaving breast, this fear faded slowly away; the lines of his face softened and relaxed, and only gaunt, thin-lipped hunger remained to pinch his features and to gleam in his wolfish eyes.

They continued to gaze silently at each other and then the man's glance fell on the bundle she held in her hand. His cracked lips moved slowly over his dry teeth and shrunken gums and he croaked forth in a hollow voice:

“What you got in that bag?”

In an instant the girl gained her self-control and a look of defiance came into her black eyes until they snapped and sparkled with anger. She stood with her heels placed closely together, her head thrown back to express her fearlessness as she slowly drew the bundle behind her, holding it with both her hands.

“None yo' business,” she replied.

He gazed at her dully as though hardly able to com-

prehend the meaning of her words. Then he swayed on his feet through the weakness that now followed his previous violent exertions in springing from the ground and plunging through the brush.

"I want it; give it here," he said as he steadied himself by a visible effort.

"Yer cain' git it," she replied, almost with a hiss, her white teeth gleaming between her parted lips and her chest swelled out in bold defiance.

"I smell meat and I want it or I'll kill you," replied the man, as the light of desperation gleamed again in his eyes. His mouth and lips grew moist at the thought of food and the sweat of weakness gathered on his forehead. Slowly he raised the pistol with trembling hand and pointed it at her.

The girl's lips curled with a sudden sneer and a look of exultant fearlessness shone in her face.

"Shoot an' be damned! I ain't afeard!" she shouted.

The man gazed at her a moment with his finger on the trigger, then his arm fell and he placed his left hand before his eyes and reeled away from her.

"Go!" he cried weakly. "Go! I can't hurt you, I won't hurt you. Lord, Lord! I can't hurt you."

The weapon dropped from his fingers and he staggered blindly, waving his hand to her.

"Go!" he again panted; and then, suddenly, as though stricken by a shot, he lurched and fell heavily on his face in the bushes.

The girl stood for a moment staring at the prostrate form and at the pistol, which lay upon the ground beyond his reach. The little stream that rose from the spring among the alders purred and bubbled busily

away. Somewhere off in the swamp a bird piped loudly; she heard the weird cry of a squirrel and then all was still—all save the little stream that gurgled and chuckled away on its sunny and shadowy path to the sea. An awful fear seized her heart as she gazed at the motionless body, and, turning suddenly with an inarticulate cry, she fled wildly through the woods, heedless of path or obstacle. She had run but a short distance when her foot was caught by a vine, and, with a straining grunt, she fell sprawling face downward on a bed of pine straw. The bundle became unfastened by her fall and its contents were scattered before her. She lay for a moment dully gazing at the wreck. A roasted quarter of pork, a number of corn ash-cakes, a big hunk of bacon and a quart bottle of whisky had tumbled out on the straw. She rose slowly to a sitting posture and passed her hands before her frightened eyes. Then she mechanically gathered up the scattered food, replaced it in the cloth and tied the corners together with trembling fingers. She sat for some moments listening carefully, but there only came to her ears the far-off piping of the swamp bird.

At last she rose to her feet and stood with conflicting emotions, gazing down the hillside toward the spot from which she had so wildly fled. Intervening undergrowth obstructed the view and she could see nothing. Turning slowly, as though drawn by some unseen force, the girl crept silently from tree to tree, keeping one always as a shield between herself and the object of her curiosity. Nearer and nearer she moved, with all the caution of a stalking Indian, until

at last, peering through the thick foliage of a stunted holly, she saw the figure of the stranger lying motionless on the ground, with his head hidden from view by the bushes among which he had fallen.

Stirred by some strange emotion which had now taken the place of fear, she stole softly to the spot and gazed at him in silence. The brightness of the pistol caught her eye, and, through perverse caution, totally at odds with her bold and fearless defiance of but a few minutes before, she picked it up and held it in her hand. The man was lying face downward and motionless. His feet were sprawled out and one arm was twisted under the body. A green lizard came running across the little open space, paused for a moment and, lifting its head, exhibited the little flap of pink skin just under its neck. Suddenly it seemed to spy the body lying near it on the ground, and, changing its course, it scurried quickly away toward a clump of brier. The bird that had piped so long somewhere off in the swamp had hushed and the only thing of life that seemed to exist was a little red-headed bug that crawled out on a leaf, and, after raising the shell-like covers of its back, waved them two or three times to free its gauzy wings and then launched forth on a seemingly aimless flight. The girl continued to stare at the man's back, and finally a sense of tightness seized her heart and she felt lonely and afraid.

"Git up," she called in an uncertain tone. "Git up, mister, I ain't er gwineter shoot yer."

No movement or sound came from the body and she stood wildly casting her glance about in search of she knew not what. Suddenly she spied his hat, and plac-



ing the bundle and the pistol on the ground, the latter being shoved out of sight among some weeds, she seized the hat and filled it with water from the spring. This she poured on the back of his head. Twice she filled it and emptied it, but still he did not move. The tears came into her eyes and a sob broke from her lips. She stood regarding him with heaving bosom and with hopelessness in her eyes.

"Now, ain't dis hell!" she muttered brokenly.

Suddenly she caught the man in her arms, and, lifting him from the bushes, laid him on his back. Her quick fingers smoothed the tangled hair from his forehead, and sitting down she drew his head upon her knee and moistened his face with water from the hat, her tears falling upon him and her body shaken with sobs. At last there came a flutter of his eyelids, a sigh escaped him and then a groan, and he began to roll his head and to move his hand feebly. A cry broke from her.

"I doan' keer," she moaned. "I doan' keer whut dey sez er whut dey does. I'm gwineter do it."

Reaching round for the bundle, she drew it to her, and, opening it, took from it the bottle of whisky. Drawing the cork with her teeth, she placed the bottle to his parted lips and let a few drops trickle between them. His breathing soon became better and his pulse stronger. He stirred and moaned and at last the half-whispered words: "Can't do it! can't do it!" came quivering from his lips. She again let some of the whisky trickle between them; he swallowed it and then opened his eyes and stared wonderingly up into her tear-stained face. After he had lain this way for

some moments, while she fanned him with his hat, she lifted him to a sitting position and handed him the whisky. He took the bottle and held it in his hand.

"Drink," she commanded, and, turning his eyes, he regarded the bottle vacantly.

"Drink," she again said with a snuffle. He lifted it slowly to his lips and took a big swallow of the fiery stuff. She brought some water in his hat and he drank it and then sat gazing at her with the same puzzled look on his face.

"Feel better?" she asked, as the color began to steal into his face and a brightness came into his eyes. He nodded his head.

"Drink again," she said, and he obeyed her. Then the two sat gazing at each other for some time without speaking a word. Finally the girl looked at him in a curious way.

"Got a knife?" she asked.

"I think so," he replied slowly.

"Give it here!" she directed.

He tried to reach into the right-hand pocket of his trousers, but they were tight and, as he leaned back, he fell over through weakness. The girl rose, and, holding his head under her arm, drew him down until he lay on his back; then she rolled him on his side, and thrusting her hand into his pocket, drew out a beautiful, pearl-handled knife. She regarded it wonderingly, for never before had she heard of or seen one like it. She opened it slowly, gazing at its several blades. Then she clicked them back in place, all except the largest, which she first wiped upon her dress, and then taking the piece of pork, she cut off a bit of the choic-

est portion, placed it on an ash-cake and handed it to him. The wolfish expression had again come into his eyes the moment he saw the food, and seizing what she offered him, he raised it with trembling hands and began to eat ravenously. She took part of it from him.

"Eat slow!" she commanded.

His jaws stopped working for a moment and he blinked vacantly at her, his mouth stuffed with food.

"Eat slow an' chaw hit up good," she directed, and after a moment his jaws began to work again, but this time more slowly than before. She fed it to him a little at a time and at last she would give him no more.

"Naw," she said firmly, as she saw him gazing longingly at the bundle. "Yer ain't gwineter git no mo' now. Yer fixin' ter founder yerse'f." The man wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and, finding a crumb on his beard, he pushed it between his lips and turned his eyes away from the bundle.

"I got ter go now," said the girl at last, as she rose to her feet.

"Don't go yet," he moaned.

"Aw, I des got ter go," she replied.

The stranger's eyes slowly filled with tears; he bowed his head and began to sob weakly.

"I des natchelly cain' he'p it. I got ter go," she said.

She stood looking about her for some moments, then going in among the alders, she found the place where he had lain hidden near the spring, and bringing pine straw from the hillside, she made a thick bed of it on the ground. Then, returning to where he sat, she took him by the arm, and, raising him, walked by his side

and guided his tottering steps to the bed of straw and let him slip softly down on it. She placed the bottle of whisky near his head, and bringing his pistol, laid it near his right hand.

"Don't go yet, please," he wailed, as the tears slowly welled from his eyes and crept down his cheeks.

"Aw, I mus' go. I des got ter go," she repeated.

He rolled over on his face and began to sob.

"Somebody'll find me and kill me when you are gone," he moaned.

"Naw dey won't nuther," she said. "You shoot um ef dey do come."

She stood regarding him for a moment, as his face was turned from her, and sobs shook his emaciated form. Then there crept into her cheeks a warm glow, her lips trembled and she dropped impulsively on her knees beside him and drew his hands from his face.

"Hush," she whispered softly, as she smoothed his hair from his forehead. "I'm er-comin' back."

"Will you?" he asked eagerly. "I'm so lonely and I've been lonely so long. Please come back!"

"Yare, I'm er-comin' back," she said, as she rose to her feet. Her glance fell upon the bottle of whisky, and she stood for a moment in doubt. Her lips parted as though to speak and then a hard look came into her eyes.

"Doan' drink all dat liquor," she said. "Hit'll kill yer sho. When yer gits weak, so weak dat yer 'bout ter play out, den tap dat liquor, but tap it light, 'kase hit's strong ernuff ter take de hide offen er steer."

At last, looking about her, she paused to straighten up the broken bushes where he had fallen and gath-

ered up a few handfuls of straw that were scattered about. There was now scarcely a mark to show any one had been on the spot, and her critical examination finally satisfied her mind that if the man remained quiet, no person who might chance to pass that way would find him, unless possessed of abnormally acute senses.

She caught up the bundle and crept softly back to where he lay. Finding he was now asleep, she turned away and sped swiftly through the woods, a new light in her eyes and a strange tightness at her throat. Once or twice she thought of the whisky and wondered whether she had been wise to leave it, but each time she drew her head back and the hard look came into her face.

"I doan' keer," she muttered, "I ain't afeared. I done fotch er dead man ter life wid it an' he needs it." Finally, after she had proceeded quietly through the woods for a mile or more, she began to sing softly to herself:

"I baked me uv er pudden cake  
 An' hit wuz good an' fine;  
 My true love he come ridin' by  
 An' how his eyes did shine!

He come into de kitchen an'  
 Me in his arms did take,  
 An' sez: 'My Honey, Sugar-lump,  
 Dis am yo' weddin' cake.'

## CHAPTER XV

### IKE SIMPSON'S DAUGHTER

The Simpson home stood upon a hill in the "oakystreak" country of southeast Alabama. There was the father, Ike Simpson, a tall, raw-boned, grizzled man with sharp black eyes, aquiline nose and rather stern face. His wife was a faded blonde, with wrinkled face and tired, washed-out blue eyes. Of the three children, Mary, the youngest, alone resembled old Ike. The two sons, Jerry and Pete, had the lineaments and coloring, or rather lack of coloring, of their mother.

Ike Simpson and his sons were moonshiners. They planted and raised each year a good crop of corn, for Ike had a species of nervous energy which, while spasmodic, sufficed, nevertheless, for this purpose. His sons were of duller, heavier clay, but he had always managed to make them stay behind the plow or at work with the hoe long enough and often enough to keep the crop fairly clean. Jerry and Pete had always obeyed their father, for there were but few temptations about them and they had feared his wrath from their earliest childhood.

During the winter months the corn they had raised was made into whisky at a distillery or "still," which they had set up many years before. Neither road nor

path led to it, and had revenue officers been detailed to find it and in their search depended upon following footprints or wagon tracks to the spot, they would never have located it. The truth is, they never did find it, although search was made by them many times. Old Ike's shrewdness was too much for them, and while the location of the still made the work exceedingly disagreeable and laborious, it nevertheless insured safety. There was only one man who held old Ike's liberty in his hand and that was the man to whom the whisky was sold. Mrs. Simpson had once questioned her husband on that subject.

"Ike," she asked, "ain't yer never skeered 'bout dat man Burt lettin' de cat outen de bag?"

The moonshiner looked serious for a moment and then smiled, as he picked his teeth with his hunting-knife.

"Naw," he replied. "In de fus' place, ef he blows, why, dey ketches him fer retailin' liquor whut wuz fotch f'um er still an' ain't paid no lison. In de secon' place,"—he continued slowly,—“ef dey wuz ter ketch him fus', he ain't gwineter blow nohow, 'kase he knows dat I ain't de sort whut people blows on. He laks his gizzard too good ter want er bullet-hole in it. An' den on top uv dat, dey des natchelly ain't gwine ter ketch me fus'. Ef er revenue tries ter go thu de mud an' slush ter dat still, he cudden git ter it in er thousan' years. Ef he tries ter wade up de branch, de fus' thing he knows, he done stuck his foot in er b'ar-trap big ernuff ter break his leg. I got de swamp sowed wid b'ar-traps, hid so ez yer cain' see um, an' hit doan' tek but one nibble uv dem masheens 'fo' dey hatter git de

sawbones fer ter saw yer laig off. Dey ain't gwineter monkey wid me much, but I ain't er-huntin' no trouble. I hides out when dey smells roun', but dey better not push me too fur."

The moonshiner's confidence in Burt did not make him the less careful and, though his sons often pleaded with him for a change of location for the still, he would never consent to it, and it remained where, after long deliberation, he had first placed it. It was of course located on a stream, so that running water might be had. From the upper stream the spot could not possibly be approached, as the water was spread out over acres of cane-covered ooze through which no man could pass. There were many springs in this morass, and the water from them all gathered at about the same spot and, joining the stream, which had formed again after being spread over so much space, the larger volume of water swept southward in a bold current that was nearly waist deep. Everything was carried to the still in sacks borne upon the backs of the workers, and they waded safely up the middle of the stream, whose bottom was an underlying stratum of rock and whose banks were of black oozy mud, thickly grown over with reeds and filled with hundreds of tiny springs.

On a wide, solid spot near the center of the swamp and close to a clear and never-failing spring, the still had been set up. There was a clump of cypress trees about it, and the smoke, when the still was running, was conveyed into a hollow cypress, whose chinks, except for one to furnish a draft, had been stopped with mud. Passing up the long trunk of this tree,



most of the soot was taken from it, and when it at last escaped from a dozen little outlets high in the top, it came in films that were almost colorless and were at once hidden by the foliage of the surrounding trees and entirely dissipated by even the slightest currents of air.

Word had come to old Ike from the town where he sold his stuff, that six men, one of them known to be a revenue officer, had stopped for supper and had inquired about the roads that led in the direction of his place. They might even then be on the way. So he and his two sons loaded their rifles and took to the swamps several miles away, arranging a spot where they could be found and where food should be brought to them. Mrs. Simpson was to explain that they had gone to Florida to hunt cedar land for a party in Pensacola. The man knew the revenue officers had been on his track for a long time. Once they had hung around his place so long he had taken a bold stand and ordered them away. The experience was not remembered by him with much pleasure and a guilty conscience now made flight seem the proper, as well as the easiest, solution of the matter. So he rose in the night and, with many curses, took to the swamp, accompanied by Jerry and Pete.

Early the next morning, Mary Simpson had set out through the woods with food for the party. She was late in reaching the spot, and her father and brothers were both hungry and angry.

As she drew near the mouth of the little stream where she was to meet them she found her father seated on a log, his rifle across his knees and his keen

eyes regarding her with a look of mingled anger and inquiry.

"Is dey come?" he asked.

"Is who come?" she asked in return, waking as from a dream.

"De revenues," he replied hotly. "Who de hell yer reckon I'm er axin' yer 'bout?"

"Naw, dey ain't come," she said.

The look of inquiry passed from his face and only the anger remained. The two sons now came and sat near them.

"How come yer got here so late?" asked the man.

"Got los'," she replied with a gulp, as she handed her father the bundle. Her eyes sought the ground, and she stood idly kicking the dead leaves with her bare toes.

He gazed at her a moment with a searching look.

"Yer lyin'," he said.

"Yer ernother," she retorted quickly.

He took the bundle and began to grumble and growl while he unfastened it. Suddenly his eyes fell on the spot from which a piece of meat had been cut.

"Who done dat?" he asked.

"I done it."

"Whut fer?"

"Ter see ef 'twuz cook' done," she replied in a sullen tone.

Under ordinary circumstances Mary Simpson would not have lied to her father at all. She was usually able to hold her own with him in a war of words and was the only member of his family that did not fear

him. She had considered the matter long and earnestly as she made her way through the woods. She did not want her father to know what she had been about, for she knew well that there would be trouble—and a great deal of it—should he learn of her encounter with the stranger. Having once made up her mind to lie to him, she did it with an ease that was almost astonishing to her. Her language was inelegant, but none the less effective and to the point. There was a sense of oppression at her breast that caused her now and then to breathe deeply, and an artery in her throat throbbled strangely and seemed to press something against the roots of her tongue, which made that member heavy and slow to respond to the calls of her brain upon it. This was, however, but an impression of her mind, for it had not yet failed her for an instant.

Old Ike continued to growl and to search through the bundle. Suddenly he raised his eyes and a fierce gleam of anger glittered in them.

“Whar’s de liquor?” he asked.

“Ain’t it in dere?” she asked with a show of surprise.

“Naw, hit ain’t, an’ yer know durned well hit ain’t.”

“Wall; I fell down an’ I reckon I lost hit,” she replied indifferently.

He sprang to his feet and struck at her with his open hand.

“Yer lyin’, yer she-devil!” he cried.

The girl stepped quickly out of reach of the blow. The blood flamed in her cheeks and her eyes blazed

with anger. Then she suddenly stepped forward and thrust her face out within his reach.

"Hit it, hit it!" she hissed, "an' I'll leave yer an' go 'way."

"Hit her, dad," urged Pete, whose anger had also been stirred at her failure to bring the whisky.

"You shet up," growled the man. He gazed at his daughter's trembling face for a moment and a look of pride shone in his eyes. He had always admired his own fearlessness and recklessness, and this occasional wild rebellion on his daughter's part pleased him much. He seated himself once more on the log and began to spread out the food beside him.

"Whar would yer go ef yer wuz ter run erway?" he asked slowly.

Mary Simpson straightened her form and stood proudly and defiantly before him.

"Ter hell er anywheres," was the reply.

Old Ike chuckled softly, and he and his two sons gathered together and began to eat. When they had finished, he looked over at his daughter, who was sitting on a log, gazing sullenly at the ground.

"Mary," he said gently, as he wiped the grease from his lips with the back of his hand. "I wuzn't meanin' ter hit yer des now."

"Dat's how come de reason fer why yer hit at me, I reckon," she replied with a sniff.

"Naw," he said slowly, "I wuz des er-fannin' de win', honey. When I hits out sho nuff, I allus lan's de lick."

Mary was silent. Her mind had gone back to the ragged stranger whom she had left asleep in the

hollow among the alders. He would be hungry again when she should return to him, but she had no way of getting food for him. She was afraid to ask her father for a part of what she had brought to him, and it would be useless, anyway, for she would be expected to eat it at once. His suspicions had already been aroused, and she feared he would track her on her return home; so she sat and worried over it until a look of sadness settled on her usually happy face. Old Ike regarded her intently.

"What's de matter wid you, anyhow?" he asked suddenly.

The girl started as though her very thoughts had been discovered, but her features became quickly composed and she drooped her head.

"You know whut's de matter," she responded vaguely. Another lie was jotted down on Mary Simpson's balance sheet up where tab is kept on those things. No angel blotted it out with his tears, for his task would have been useless. As long as questions affecting the safety of the stranger should be asked, Mary meant to lie and to continue to lie, calmly and without a single regret. Troops and bands of sobbing angels might have come to plead with her, but she would only have hardened her face and lied as long as there was breath in her body.

Her father sat eying her for some time and at last spoke up.

"Git on back ter de house now, honey," he said. "Fergit 'bout dat hittin', 'kase hit wuz des er joke. Study 'bout yo' po' ol' daddy down here in de swamp chased by revenues."

To this Mary made no reply.

"Dem revenues mout kill de ol' man," he continued with a low chuckle, his eyes twinkling with merriment as he fondled his long-barreled rifle, with which he could easily kill a squirrel at one hundred yards at least nine times out of ten.

The girl rose from the log where she had been sitting and began to walk away without looking back or making a reply.

"Fetch dat liquor ter-morrer now," he called after her.

She stalked on through the woods, sullenly silent.

"Does yer hear?" he cried angrily.

"Co'se I hears," she retorted. "I ain't deaf."

"Wall, you fetch it, an' doan' gib me none o' yo' lip 'bout it nuther," he replied.

Mary walked slowly for some moments and then halted. Her heart was troubled, for, in truth, she loved her father dearly. He was hasty and hot-tempered and at times he had struck her when she had been wilful and disobedient, but he had always been sorry for it afterward. Besides this, she knew she was the pride of his stern old heart; he had always sided with her in her differences with her brothers and even with her mother. He seldom paused to reason, but acted almost always on impulse, and that impulse had never led him away from her for long. Her lips quivered and the tears came into her eyes, though, had he come upon her at that moment, she would have dashed them quickly away and lied to him again as often as she might deem necessary.

"I ain't er doin' right," she muttered brokenly; so,

turning quickly, she placed her hands to her mouth and called to her father:

“Good-by, daddy.”

“Good-by, sugar-pie,” was borne to her through the woods.

Her heart became light again, and with her head held high she strode quickly along through the woods with springy, noiseless tread.

When she came to the hill that overlooked the hollow where the stranger lay sleeping, she sat down on a log to gaze upon the thicket of alders and to think.

Into the heart of this poor maiden many strange thoughts crept. Untutored in gentleness or in the softer moods of womanhood, she was nevertheless filled with a great pity for this starved, ragged and unattractive being who had staggered out before her and threatened her with death. He might be a revenue officer who had got lost, for all that she knew, and her eyes grew hard and merciless at the thought. She hated them all from the bottom of her heart, and sometimes felt as though she could kill one with her own hands and never think of it again except with a sense of satisfaction. The stony look passed from her and she sat thinking. Her opinion, after woman's way, was shaped by her wishes.

“He ain't no revenue,” she muttered at last. “Naw, sir. Why, he could uv shot me des ez easy ez scat, an' he never done it; not him. He des wabbed erway an' got ter studyin' 'bout how he mout uv shot me, an' bein' weak an' hongry, too, he lak ter drapped dead. He could uv done it easy an' den tuk all de grub.

Naw," she continued with conviction, as she rose to her feet, "dat po' man, he ain't no revenue."

Softly the girl went down the hillside and then, creeping to the hiding-place among the alders, she sat down and watched him while he slept. He was restless, his face was flushed and now and then he murmured in his sleep. The girl curled her feet under her and watched him with quiet interest. A dark red flower was growing at the base of an alder and her glance rested upon it longingly. A slight breeze stirred it and it nodded at her invitingly, so she rose softly and, plucking it, thrust the stem gently between the man's fingers. She did not know why she did this; she only knew that the flower attracted her and that somehow she wanted to give it to him. Then she sat down beside him and continued to watch and to wait. Suddenly he stirred and a smile came upon his wan lips.

"Katie says there is nice cool milk in the milk-house," he murmured.

The girl rose to her knees with a peculiar expression on her face and touched him gently.

"Wake up," she whispered; "hit's me."

He opened his eyes suddenly, raised himself quickly and gazed at her with a puzzled expression. Then a look of recognition came into his face and he smiled weakly.

"Been 'sleep all de time?" she asked in a solicitous voice.

"Yes, ever since you left," he replied.

The girl saw that he was thirsty and, taking an inverted magnolia leaf, she gave him water, filling



the leaf many times. At last he was satisfied, and then she handed him the whisky.

"Tetch it sorter light," she cautioned, as he took a swallow. He lay back wearily on the straw.

"Who are you?" he murmured at last.

"I'm des Mary,—Mary Simpson," she replied. He gazed at her out of half-closed eyes and heaved a deep sigh.

"I would have died soon if you hadn't fed me," he said slowly.

Then his eyes closed and a look of anguish came into his face. He was drifting back over it all and the tears suddenly came and trickled freely down his cheeks.

"Doan' do dat," she cried softly. "Dat's cry-baby; dat's gal-baby. I ain't gwineter let nothin' bother yer."

He swept his hand over his eyes. The girl came and, kneeling by him, wiped his face with the soft part of her bonnet.

Then she rose and began to walk restlessly about, his glance following her wherever she went. She paused suddenly and, loosening the folds in her skirt where she had tucked it up, she let it fall until it reached her ankles. Then she came and sat down by him, gazing earnestly into his eyes.

"Who is Katie?" she asked suddenly.

The man rose quickly to a sitting position and a look of fear came into his face.

"Katie!" he exclaimed. "What do you know about Katie?"

"Nothin'," she replied.

"Why do you ask, then? Where did you hear her name?"

"I des heer'd yer mumblin' 'bout Katie in yer sleep," she answered.

No further words passed between them for some moments. Then Mary Simpson looked at him in the same earnest way and a lump swelled up and stood in her throat.

"Tell me who Katie is," she said.

"Katie is my sister," he returned.

Mary Simpson's glance fell and she dug nervously in the ground with a little stick that her fingers chanced upon. The man placed his hand on her head.

"Mary," he murmured, "you are a good girl."

A flush crept into her cheeks and her eyes glowed strangely, but she continued to dig nervously in the ground with the little stick. Far up on the hill a cicada was humming and trilling away and at last its song died out in a rattling wail.

"Yes, you are a good girl, Mary," he continued tremulously, as he gently stroked her thick black hair. "You have saved my life, for a while, anyway, and maybe it's right after all for me to stay and try to work out life as best I can."

She dug a little hole in the ground and sniffed.

"You ain't got no notion uv kickin' de bucket," she murmured.

"Not now, I haven't," he replied.

The little hole in the ground grew larger and took on a ragged, nervously-executed shape.

"An' yer ain't got no notion uv movin' on yet, is yer?" she asked at last.

"I don't know," he said thoughtfully. "I'm a little too weak yet."

"I'll fetch yer grub fer er while," she mumbled. "Better sorter stay hid out here er little while longer anyhow, an' den, den maybe yer kin move on easy."

A flood of thankfulness swept over him and, bowing his head low, he seized one of her hands and kissed it.

"You are a good girl, Mary," he murmured softly.

She jabbed the stick into the ground again, but with so much force that it broke short off. She snapped the remaining bit nervously between her fingers and rose to her feet.

"I got ter go now," she said falteringly.

"Wait a while."

"Naw, I is 'bleedged ter go an' you better stay hid, too, an' keep dat pistol handy."

He lay back on the straw once more and a look of hopelessness crept into his face. Mary stood eying him nervously, the while she fingered and turned the bit of stick that still remained in her hands.

"Doan' be er-takin' on so," she said at last. "I'm er-comin' back. I ain't sho 'bout de time, but I'm er-comin'."

"Do come back," he murmured.

"I'll whistle *Little Brown Jug*, so ez yer woan' shoot me," she said.

She walked up and down for a few moments, gazing at him strangely, then she suddenly bade him good-by and left him staring up at the branches of the trees, which were twined together far above him.

When she had reached the top of the hill down

which she had run so light-heartedly only that morning, Mary Simpson gathered up her skirts, fastened them again at her hips and fled through the woods toward home, her heart beating fast and a strange fullness in her bosom.

At last she seated herself on a log and gazed at the hand he had kissed. She had never before heard of such a thing. Once her mother had said to her: "Mary, de way ter tell dat yer is dead gone on er man is when yer des natchelly feels lak yer wants ter kiss him on top de haid. Dat's er sho, unfailin' sign." She thought of this and also of the stranger's tousled hair, and shook her head slowly. Then she gazed once more at her hand and a single exclamation broke from her.

"Wall, I'll jes' be derved!" she muttered.

When Mary reached home she found that a second messenger had come from the man Burt with the information that the revenue officers had taken another road, had arrested several men charged with cutting timber belonging to the Government and had returned with them to the town.

That afternoon Mrs. Simpson made the trip through the woods to tell the men that they could return in safety, and Mary was left to attend to the household duties and take care of the place. She thought often of the stranger, of how she had promised to feed him, and wondered what excuse she could give that would enable her to remain away from home long enough to reach him. She puzzled over it for some time and at last sat down on the back steps almost ready to weep over her misfortunes.

She had calculated, when she made the promise, that she would have to make the trip to the mouth of the little stream at least every day for possibly a week, but now the messenger had come and her mother had insisted on going to tell the men the good news, and so the stranger would have to starve.

As she sat thinking over her troubles, a long-legged pullet came marching leisurely down the yard and stood eying her with insolent interest. A hatchet lay beside her and, reaching softly back, she caught it and hurled it at the pullet. The hatchet would have gone wide of the mark, but the pullet, with a flirt and a bound which chanced to be in the wrong direction, collided with the hatchet and was bowled over quite dead. Quickly the girl took the chicken and hurried out of the yard, down the lane on the hillside and into the woods beyond. Here she chopped off its head and plucked off the feathers. Returning to the house, she secured the necessary articles, built a fire in the woods and, after properly preparing the chicken, she fried it. This done, she dug a hole in the ground and buried the ashes, cinders and feathers and returned to the house. She removed from the kitchen utensils every evidence of recent use. She placed the fried chicken, together with a number of biscuits, in a bucket, and went out to milk the two cows. Her mother usually attended to this, but Mary meant to surprise her and have the work all done on the return of the party from the woods.

“Ma’ll be putty tired, I reckon,” she murmured. “I spect she’ll be sorter glad I done de milkin’. De cows doan’ give fer me lak dey does fer her,” she said with

a laugh, as she poured part of the milking into a small tin bucket and hid it in her bedroom along with the fried chicken. "I guess maybe de calf got at Spot bewhilst I wuz milkin' Susie, an' dat's how come de crap sorter short."

When the others returned, nothing was said about the milking, and she knew it would be another day before the chicken would be missed. She intended to deny any knowledge on that score and to suggest that a hawk could easily have caught it if it had wandered out of the yard. She knew no further mention would be made of it, but that a lookout would be kept for chicken-hawks for some time to come.

That night Mary waited until everything about the house was quiet and she felt that the others were all asleep. Then she crept out of bed, dressed herself hurriedly and, opening her window, dropped noiselessly out to the ground, holding in her hands the two tin buckets. She hurried to the wood-house and gathered up several pieces of lightwood; then with one bucket at her elbow, another in her hand and a supply of resinous pine sufficient to make a torch that would last her to the end of her journey, she passed out of the yard and made her way through the darkness toward the woods.

It chanced that old Ike was unable to sleep that night and was sitting by his window, when he saw his daughter make her way to the wood-house and gather up some lightwood. He slipped on his trousers and, sliding noiselessly out upon the ground, crawled to the corner of the house and watched her pass out of the gate. For a moment he was tempted to call her, but

seeing the buckets that she carried, he decided not to do so. Returning quickly to the house, he roused his son Jerry, and the two dressed hurriedly, gathered up their rifles and set out at a trot in the direction the girl had taken. Old Ike thought of the piece of pork from which a portion had been cut and his mind dwelt continually upon the controversy concerning the lost whisky. A dozen questions shot rapidly through his mind and he gritted his teeth together in anger.

The two hurried on until they entered the woods and then, far out among the trees, they saw a light smoking and bobbing about as the girl proceeded on her way.

"Skeered uv snakes!" muttered Jerry.

"Yas, an' she'll be skeered uv her daddy befo' she gits done wid dis business," muttered her father.

"Jerry," he continued fiercely, "ef dat gal is tradin' an' traffikin' wid revenues, I'm gwimeter kill her an' dem, too." His face was stern, and he and his son followed silently after the torch as it bobbed and winked through the woods, now out of sight for a moment and again flaring up bright and clear as the girl passed through an open space beneath the trees. Once she started suddenly and, stepping back, circled round.

"Snake!" muttered Jerry, but the old man remained silent.

It was very dark in the woods and the men stumbled often, but Mary did not seem to hear them and continued hurriedly on her way. At last she passed out of sight behind a thicket of bushes and descended a straw-covered hill. Slowly the men crept

along, finding their way through the darkness and between the tangles of undergrowth and vines by long habit. Suddenly old Ike touched his son and they paused on the brow of the hill. Somewhere below them they heard Mary whistling *Little Brown Jug*. They could see the reflection of the light on the branches of the trees, but they could see neither the girl nor the torch. After a moment the whistling ceased and there came the faint sound of voices. They wormed their way nearer until at last the torch came to view. It was sticking in the ground and another piece of lightwood had been added to it to freshen the flame. The two crawled slowly round until the open space among the alders lay unobstructed before them. Mary was seated on the ground with her fingers laced about her knees and a strange man was sitting near her drinking milk from the bucket. The girl had remembered his delirious call and, at the risk of her life, had come to him that her word might not be broken. Old Ike gazed at the two for a moment and a sobbing curse broke from his lips.

"Damn him! Damn him, and damn her, too!" he hissed and, raising his long rifle to his shoulder with a quick movement, he pulled the trigger. There was a spurt of flame, a quick, sharp report and the stranger pitched backward, the tin bucket falling from his hands. In an instant there was total darkness, for Mary had overturned and extinguished the torch with a quick movement of her hand. Only a few places upon it glowed red and bright, but these old Ike could not see. She crawled to the stranger and, seizing him in her arms, dragged him from the spot where he had



fallen. She also shifted her own position and waited with compressed lips and a horror in her heart for she knew not what. Suddenly she thought of the pistol, and, feeling for it in the darkness, found it.

"O you hussy, you hell-cat, you she-devil!" cried her father in a voice that was choking with anger. She heard a cracking in the bushes as he moved toward her and, raising the pistol, pointed it in the direction of the sound.

"I'll shoot!" she cried hoarsely. "He's done dead, but I'll shoot."

"Shoot, you heifer!" replied the voice. "Yas, he's dead; dead an' in hell, whar I sen' him."

In an instant the fire sprang from the revolver; there was a loud report and a bullet went whizzing within a foot of old Ike's head. For a few moments there was a dead silence, but the girl again shifted her position. Old Ike and his son had each sought safety behind a tree.

"I'll kill yer fer dat!" he yelled with rage.

No reply came to him; the woods were as silent as death.

"I'll kill yer fer dat, ez sho ez hell!" again yelled her father. For a long while there was silence and then suddenly a cry arose, a weird, sobbing cry that froze the blood in old Ike's veins and made the skin on his back draw up in little bumps as a shiver slipped over him. Sitting there at bay among the alders, she had leaned over and, placing her hand on the stranger's head, had withdrawn it all sticky with warm blood. Then, with the agony that shot through her soul, she realized why she had come to feed and

care for this man, why she had fired the shot at her father and why she now sat with a revolver in her hand, intent upon killing both her father and brother. What hope was there now for her at home? None. What hope was there for her away from home, now that he was dead? None. She cast the weapon from her and, staggering to her feet, cried aloud with a despairing wail:

"Oh, Lawdy! Lawd Gawd er mussy! I wants ter die, die, die!"

Suddenly she broke through the alders and rushed through the-darkness toward her father.

"Shoot!" she screamed. "Shoot, fer I wants ter die! Load yer rifle, Ike Simpson, an' shoot yer onlies' daughter thu de heart, fer she gwineter do it herself ef yer don't. Shoot, shoot, shoot!"

Instead of the flash of flame and the tearing of a bullet through her breast which she expected and for which she so frantically prayed, she heard a far-off crashing among the brush and the sound of hurrying footsteps. Old Ike and his son had fled.

"Shoot!" she screamed once more, but only silence followed. She turned with a wail of despair and, stumbling back to the spot where the stranger lay, threw herself heavily on the ground and began to sob loudly.

"Oh, I wisht I wuz dead. I wisht ter Gawd I wuz dead," she moaned.

She lay for a long while sobbing, but at last she grew more quiet. There seemed to be a stone in her bosom and she wondered vaguely why it did not all end. She thought of God, the God whose name she

had seldom heard spoken save in connection with an oath. He was to her simply a great, invisible body, who could help her or kill her or do something for her, and so she repeated His name again and again and moaned. Now and then there would be a storm of weeping which would at last subside, and then only the moans remained to voice her grief and despair.

Suddenly she heard a noise. At first it sounded far off, but strange and unearthly. Perhaps the angels were coming to take her life and bear her away. Her pulse quickened at the thought and she sat up and listened, but did not grow afraid. Then it came to her clearly.

"O Lawdy, Lawdy, my little honey! Oh, please, ma'am, come on an' let's go home," wailed a voice. "O, my little Mary, my little angel, honey gal, I didn't go ter do it."

"Go 'way f'um here," she screamed. "I'm gwinter die."

"Oh, please, mer little preshis!" wailed the voice. "Please, mer darlin' little lamb! I swears ter Jesis Gawd I wouldn' er done it ef I had er knowed yer wuz lovin' him. I 'lowed hit wuz er revenue whut wuz foolin' mer sweet angel."

"Yer lie!" cried the girl, and then, springing to her feet, she threw her arms wildly toward the sky and screamed at the top of her voice: "Murder, Lawd! Murder, murder, m-u-r-d-e-r!"

Her cry was the despairing wail of a hopeless soul, a plea for justice and for death that sounded high above the tree-tops and reached into far recesses of the

swamp, where wild animals started to their feet in fear and fled from the awful sound. Higher it rose and higher, when suddenly it wavered and broke. There was silence for a second, and then the girl pitched forward and fell on her face with a heavy thud. A wild cry broke from old Ike, and he tore through the bushes to where she lay.

"Oh, my putty baby! Oh, daddy's honey!" he wailed, as he groped about on his knees and felt for her body with his hands. At last he found her and lifted her quickly in his arms, but her head fell back and he heard a gurgle in her throat, so he laid her again on the ground and wrung his hands frantically.

"Come here, you devil!" he shouted to his son, and, without waiting for him to come, he struck a match and set fire to the lightwood splinters which Mary had extinguished for her own and the stranger's safety.

"Come on!" he yelled again to his fear-stricken son.

Jerry's face was ashy when he crept into the circle of light.

"Is she dead?" he asked with a gulp.

"Shet up an' come here er I'll bust yo' haid open," shouted old Ike, the tears streaming down his face. He made Jerry bring water from the spring in his hat, and dashed it into her face again and again. Her long black hair had fallen loose, her face was bloodless, and she lay as one dead.

"Oh," moaned old Ike, "honey, please git well! Please git well, daddy's baby gal. O Lawdy, please git well."

Finally a shudder ran through her body; a sigh escaped her and then a moan. She panted slowly for

breath, her eyes quivered and then opened, and with their opening a horror shone in their depths as she looked up into her father's face:

"O-o-h!" she gurgled, as she strove for speech. Then she turned her face from him and the tears rolled down her cheeks. Old Ike was heartbroken. He dropped down on his knees beside her and blubbered like a child.

"I didn't know it. I didn't go ter do it. I swear I wudden er-done it," he sobbed.

"O-o-h!" she panted. "Doan' tetch me, doan' tetch me. O-o-h, no, no, no!" And her body began to shake again, as a quivering wail rose to her lips.

"O honey, honey, honey!" he cried in agony.

"He's dead," she moaned. "Dead an' murdered, an' he hadn' never done nothin' ter nobody! Po' starve' man, po' starve' little man! an' now he's dead, dead an' murdered. Oh, murder, murder, murder!"

Old Ike was now fairly frantic. He threw himself face downward and beat his head against the ground.

"O good Gawd, hell an' thunder!" he whined in his heart-agony. She had spurned him, his own and only daughter, and had turned from him, after looking into his face, with a horror of him in her eyes. Jerry sank down with weak knees and watched his father grovel and roll about on the ground.

"O Moses an' Abraham!" cried the old man, as he ground his teeth in impotent and mingled rage and despair. "Moses an' Abraham, seben angels, nineteen polecats an' er billy-goat! Good Gawd, I wisht I wuz dead!"

"Oh, murder, murder, murder!" moaned the girl,

The old man scrambled frantically to his knees. These moans were driving him mad. He stumbled to his feet and tramped round in a circle, alternately weeping and swearing and hardly knowing what he was about. Suddenly he caught sight of Jerry, who had drawn back in the edge of some bushes, his eyes big with fear as he watched his father dancing about like a man bereft of sense and possessed of the devil. Old Ike seized a chunk of wood and hurled it at his son.

"Do sump'n, you bizzard!" he shouted. "Doan' you see I'm done gone crazy?"

Jerry dodged the chunk and started to run to escape his father's wrath, when suddenly a yell of horror broke from him and, turning back again, he fled past his father and out into the darkness, where he stumbled over something and tumbled with a crash into the bushes.

Ike Simpson's arms fell to his side and his mouth dropped open, for there had staggered into the light a most fearful looking object. It was the figure of a man, covered with blood from head to waist, and the hands were all dabbled with red.

"What is it? What is it?" sputtered the being. It wavered for a moment and then its legs gave way as a baby's would and it sat down.

"What is it?" it again asked in a strange, bewildered voice.

"O Mary, I missed him, I missed him! Here he is!" shouted her father, as he sprang to her side and raised her up.

The girl swept her hair from her forehead with

quick hands and gazed for a moment at the object sitting near her. Her black eyes stared wildly; she strove to speak and then, pointing her hand toward the blood-soaked and unrecognizable being that sat mumbling and sputtering strangely, she burst into a wild peal of laughter. Again and again she laughed, and this laughter, so weird and unnatural, made old Ike's skin creep and shiver on his body.

"That!" she cried. "That!" and, falling back upon the ground, she rolled her head from side to side, and peal after peal of hysterical laughter issued from her lips.

Her father stood over her, and into his eyes there came a wild expression that verged almost on madness.

"Great Je-ru-salem!" he wailed. "I'm done los' mer min'."

Suddenly Ike Simpson heard a voice. The bloody being who sat near him on the ground was dabbling his fingers in his matted hair.

"Somebody shot me!" he sputtered.

"Jerry!" shouted the old man. "Come here, quick! Come wash de blood offen dis man." Out in the bushes Jerry groaned.

"I wouldn' tetch him fer forty acres er lan'," he replied.

The old man seized the stranger and, half-dragging him to the spring, began to wash the blood from his face and head. At last Jerry stumbled into the light, limping and holding his leg tightly in his hands. "I lak ter broke it," he moaned.

"Come here an' he'p me," shouted his father.

Jerry hobbled up and the two soon had most of

the blood washed away, old Ike using his bandana for that purpose. He examined the man's head and found that the round bullet, hurriedly fired from the muzzle-loading rifle, had struck the skull a glancing lick and simply stunned him. Beyond the loss of blood, there was but little injury.

"Whut yer gwineter do wid him?" asked Jerry.

"Tek him home, yer fool, ter keep dat gal f'um stayin' crazy. She's ez crazy right now ez seben loons, an' I'm crazier dan er hundred an' sixty."

At last they were ready, when suddenly old Ike's glance fell on a bottle that lay on the ground. He picked it up and saw it was nearly full of whisky. An oath escaped him, but he walked over to his daughter and, kneeling down by her, made her take a swallow of it.

"He's all right now, honey, an' us'll tek him home," he whispered. He rose and, glancing at the stranger with a look of mingled hope and hatred, he placed the bottle to the man's lips and made him drink. Then they started on their journey; Jerry held a torch and led the stranger, while old Ike carried his daughter in his arms, where she lay weeping softly like a little child. Many times they halted to rest, and at last Mary pleaded to be allowed to walk; it was well she did, for the burden was telling on her father.

At last they reached home, where Mary was quickly put to bed by her mother and soon sobbed herself to sleep. Jerry and Pete removed the stranger's blood-soaked clothing, bathed him gently and, after putting clean cotton garments on him, laid him in their own bed. Old Mrs. Simpson dressed his wound and bound



up his head and, after taking a drink of whisky, he closed his eyes with a weary sigh and fell asleep.

The next day old Ike was sitting in front of his house smoking his pipe. He had slept but little since the occurrence of the previous night and there were dark circles under his eyes. Jerry had gone after their rifles, which they had been obliged to leave in the swamp, and had not yet returned.

"Wall," murmured the old man to himself. "I lak ter played thunder dat time sho." He blinked his eyes slowly and, puffing at his pipe, sat wondering who the stranger was and how it would all end. Suddenly his son Pete came hurriedly out of the house and sat down on the steps. He was holding something in his hand.

"Look er here, pa," he cried in a low tone.

The old man turned his head slowly.

"Whut's de matter now?" he asked.

"Dat raggety man had 'bout three hunderd dollars in greenbacks in dem rags uv his'n. Dat man is some pertaters, I tell yer. Dat gal is got mo' sense 'n all de balance uv us."

"Whut!" exclaimed the old man in astonishment.

"Yas, suh!" repeated his son. "Three hunderd dollars!"

Old Ike sat for a moment gazing out toward the woods, buried in deep thought. Then he knocked the ashes from his pipe, placed it on the steps and, entering the house softly, made his way to Mary's room. The girl lay staring up at the ugly, brown ceiling; her fingers were picking at the coverlet in a tremulous, uncertain way and her lips were hot and dry.

"Mary," he asked, as he put his head down near her, "does yer want dat man?"

She turned her head toward him and gazed up with feverish eyes and flushed face, but made no reply.

"I means, honey," stammered her father, "does yer want him wid er preacher, er er squire, an' er marriage, an' all de whole business?"

Mary's eyes shone still brighter. Then she closed them and a tear trickled slowly down her cheek. Her lips quivered and a lump gathered in her throat. One hand stole softly over and patted her father's head affectionately.

"Does yer, honey?" he again asked in a gentle tone.

The girl covered her face with her arm, her cheeks burned and she turned her head from him.

"Yas," she murmured faintly.

"All right," murmured her father, as he stroked her hair softly for a moment and then rose from his seat. "Fatten him up, honey, an' he's your'n."

## CHAPTER XVI

### "DE FOOL AN' DE POCKET-KNIFE"

On Sunday Martin ate his dinner alone. The president had gone away that morning, and he enjoyed the quiet that hung about the place.

After dinner he wrote some letters and then, putting his pipe in his pocket, he set out for a solitary ramble through the woods. Going down to the river, he entered a little bateau and rowed across to the western bank, which was much higher than the side on which the mill property stood. Climbing up the bluff, he wandered about in the woods for some time and began to make his way leisurely northward along the bank of the stream.

The leaves of the black-gum were reddening and little stairways of yellow turned and wound about among the leaves of the poplar trees. The wine-red drupes of the sumac gleamed out from thickets over which the bamboo brier had clambered to tangle and tie the whole. Blue-stemmed goldenrod, which haunts the woodlands, brightened the leaf-strewn earth with its yellow bloom and, in the oaks overhead, the long, gray moss swung idly in the soft air.

Below him, on the eastern shore of the river, stretched, as far as the eye could reach, the green, plumy tops of the pines. There was nothing splendid

or striking about the scene, but it was grateful to the sight, and Martin stood for some time gazing at it, lost in thought.

Far up the river there was a little knoll just at the edge of the woods, and from this point a clear view could be had of the Traylor home, lying some two miles across the fields to the west. Toward this point Martin was making his way. He had all the afternoon before him, and so he wandered about, examining the plants and late flowers of the woodland.

When he reached a point opposite the inflow of a stream called Willow Creek he heard in that direction the confused sound of many voices. He halted in surprise, and then began to make his way noiselessly through the woods toward the bluff. When he came near the edge he saw many negroes working on the island across the river. They were felling small trees and appeared to be clearing out a wide space. In their midst he saw the preacher, Aaron Green, who seemed to be directing the work. It suddenly dawned on him that they were clearing a space in which to erect their church.

“Rather quick work,” he was thinking. They had asked for permission on the evening previous, and yet here they were, working like beavers on a day given them for rest. From the appearance of things, it seemed that they intended building an immense log house, as long, slender pines were being felled. He was rather pleased with their industry. Sunday was the only day they had for the work, and they were making good use of it, and, as it seemed to him, for a good purpose.

He stood looking across and down at them for some minutes, when he suddenly heard low voices just below him. He crept softly to the edge of the bluff and looked down. There, seated upon a shelving piece of ground, sat Red Shirt and the barber, De Quina. The whole face of the bluff at that point was thickly covered with trees and brush.

Martin sat down above the two men and regarded them. They were speaking some foreign language, which, from its sound, he took to be Spanish. Now and then Red Shirt or De Quina would point to some spot and they would converse together in a low tone, but with seeming animation. Again they would inspect the side of the bluff from their seat of vantage, gazing at it critically in many places.

Finally Martin, looking down, called to them.

"Say," he cried, "what are you two doing down there?"

The men sprang to their feet hurriedly, Red Shirt with a scowl on his face and De Quina with quick, anxious eyes. The latter gazed at Martin for a moment and then smiled.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "You haf ver' much me make afraid suddenly wiz yo' voice. I am so startle'!"

Red Shirt continued to scowl and remained silent.

"Well, I asked you what you are doing here. You are on the mill property and are trespassing. You have no business here," said Martin.

"Ah!" said De Quina, in a soft voice, "I ask you de pardon. I haf meet wiz Red Shirt, talk de li'l Spanish, an' we haf come to fin' de plant root,—I know not hees name, heh?"

He pointed to a little five-leaved plant growing on the ledge near where he stood.

"Ginseng?" asked Martin.

"Yazz," was the reply, "dat's heem, geensin'. We haf hear de much noise an' haf come from wood to see. Zese niggair will buil' chutch."

"Yes," said Martin, "I know,"—and, turning away, he left them and proceeded northward toward the knoll.

There, on that little hillock, he sat down, and many whispers were sighed across the cotton-fields to the quiet old home half-hidden among the trees. It seemed to him that the place had changed since the days when he had first learned to know it well. He felt that he loved every spot of it,—the green of the trees, the reddish brown soil of the fields, the gray roofs of the cabins, the orchard, the grape arbor where golden-brown scuppernongs hung in season, the yard with its beautiful flowers, some of them in bloom all the year round; he loved them all!

And so he sat in the cheerful sunlight, dreaming like a callow youth. At last he rose and, striding over to an ancient beech, he gashed her initials deep in its bark and cut the date beneath. As he stepped back to contemplate his work, he heard a sudden noise near him. His heart beat quickly, his cheeks flushed and he turned his back to hide the telltale story on the beech. It was only a gray squirrel that had sprung far out from a tall ash and fallen with a splash into a thick-leaved hickory bough and had then scampered hurriedly out of sight.

Martin turned again to the beech, closed his knife with a click and breathed his good-by across the fields

with a yearning heart. Then he turned away, while all the west was piled with rosy clouds and a soft color tinged the fields, fading and dying to purple and shading away to gray.

As Martin took his way homeward through the woods, Red Shirt rose from behind a log where he had lain concealed for some time. He cautiously approached the seat Martin had occupied and sank down to study the marks on the tree. At last the puzzled look disappeared from his face. His black lips parted with a smile of understanding and he chuckled softly to himself. He had gazed at the Traylor home from Martin's point of view, and his eyes had wandered from that to the beech and back again, until it all became clear to him.

"Wall," he exclaimed, "de fool an' de pocket-knife, dey say dat he laks dat gal putty good."

He sat gazing across the fields through the gathering darkness with thoughtful eyes. His plans for the future were as yet indefinite; they wavered in his mind from one bright dream to another, but now Martin's secret was known to him, and each mental vision of the days to come held in it some picture of vengeance to be visited by him upon these two. Each picture was sweet in his heart. At last he rose and, as he glanced once more at the letters gashed in the bark of the tree, he laughed sneeringly to himself.

"Oh, ho, ho! de fool an' de pocket-knife,—I fix dat game."

## CHAPTER XVII

### WHERE LOVE IS

The week that followed after Jessica and Virginia had gone away was for Martin, indeed, a dull one. Each day he carefully anointed his damaged eye, and the discoloration began to disappear rapidly. He felt like an outcast who was soon to be received and honored once more when his infirmity should have passed away, and so he took a peculiar pleasure in the words of encouragement that were given to him in regard to the condition of his eye when Ase was called upon for an opinion. The evenings were very long, but the two girls would soon be coming home again,—so he dwelt in the future and tended his eye faithfully.

The negroes had now begun to work at night at the building of their church. Great fires were lighted on the island and, as the work at that time consisted for the greater part simply in raising the long pine logs to their proper positions, the light from these fires was quite sufficient for that purpose, and the work progressed rapidly.

One night Martin walked up to the island and was astonished at the amount of work the negroes had accomplished. He felt that they were indeed in earnest and watched them with admiration as they toiled. All



day long they had worked in the various departments of the mill, and now here they were, laboring well into the night with a zeal and an energy almost incredible.

Some of them sang as they worked and he marveled even more at this. Their work for the company during the day was satisfactory, so if they chose to work for themselves at night, he could certainly not complain.

\* Aaron Green, the preacher, was not with them on these occasions. Martin had not seen him since the previous Sunday. He had gone away and it was not until the latter part of the following week that he put in an appearance. The barber shop kept by De Quina was also closed, but he opened his doors again one morning and explained to his customers that he had been to see about purchasing a fine barber's chair and stated that he also contemplated handling coffins. They had been somewhat vexed at his sudden departure, but were satisfied with his explanation, especially in view of the fact that the chair he was using at that time was more than uncomfortable. Red Shirt had been missed by no one, but that character had also taken his departure, going and returning at about the same time that the barber and Aaron Green went and came. People had now ceased to discuss this negro. He worked for no one and seemed to keep out of sight most of the time, only appearing on the streets of Granville when he went to purchase something or paused to talk Spanish with the barber.

The church had been roofed with boards. It was not to be floored, and the negroes explained that they intended to cover the ground with sawdust, and that in a year or two they would build a better church and

let the society have the one they were now about completing.

A committee had been selected to arrange the horse-play and buffoonery necessary to the initiations, and the dark hints that were let fall by these to the younger mill-hands as to the character of these initiations spurred them to greater energy in the work that they might be favored by an early admission and thus enjoy the discomfiture of those who would afterward undergo the ordeals.

The building had two doors, one at the front and the other at the back. The interior was boarded, so as to keep out the wind and rain, and four windows were cut on each side and two at each end.

Red Shirt took no part in the work, but he and De Quina still went to seek ginseng in the woods lying back of the bluff and, though they often sat upon the little shelf of earth projecting from the face of the bluff opposite the island, the little ginseng plant continued to flourish, until one day when Red Shirt, in a mood of abstraction, dug it up and chewed the root.

One afternoon, in their wanderings, the two came to the little knoll where Martin had carved Virginia's initials in the bark of the beech. Red Shirt pointed it out to De Quina, and explained its meaning.

"I been t'ink dat man had li'l bit sense," he said, "but now he come cut he business on de tree."

They laughed long over the matter and Red Shirt took a special delight in repeating again and again:

"You wait! By Gar, I fix dat game!"

They sat on the knoll, gazing at the surrounding country, and De Quina made pencil drawings of the

topography of the whole territory that lay about them. So the second Sunday passed away and Jessica and Virginia had not returned. Mrs. Brantley was with them and they were doubtless enjoying the trip.

On Tuesday they returned and on that day Martin was in Granville and saw Jessica. He sat for an hour chatting with her, and she led him into many little predicaments, by her sympathetic allusions to his recent illness. He was made to squirm uncomfortably and always changed the subject of conversation as quickly as possible.

It seemed to him so good to have her back again; to look at her, to talk with her and to enjoy her companionship! He had never felt otherwise than perfectly at ease in her presence. He was at his best when with her. Words came to him readily and he loved to sit and pour out pretty speeches to her. On her part, she half-closed her eyes and gazed at him in a dreamy way, as she busied herself with some fancy work that took but a small amount of her attention. This work was done at his request.

"It makes things look more homelike to me," he had said. "I haven't even a cat at the offices to sit and purr at the corner of the hearth, and I get lonely, fearfully lonely."

Jessica was to him just what he had termed her on the evening when first he met her,—“a jolly good fellow.” Still there was something womanly about her that made him think often of home. Perhaps it was her good humor and her gentle way of teasing, as a wife might do.

"Bring out something and work at it," he said on

this occasion. "I haven't seen you for so long that I can drink in big drafts of home and enjoy it."

"But I have nothing," she said.

"Find something!" he directed.

She entered the house and soon returned with a pair of spectacles on her nose and a half-knitted sock in her hands. She plumped down in her chair and the needles began to click industriously.

"All this to amuse you, young man!" she said. "I am sure I shall drop forty stitches, and mother will most certainly bless me when you are gone."

She gazed at him over the top of the spectacles and laughed; and as he laughed in return, his lips suddenly closed and he regarded her critically.

"You didn't have a good time on your trip?" he said.

"Oh, but I did!" she replied. "I enjoyed it very much."

"Well, there is something the matter," he said slowly. "You look—I don't know just how to explain, but you seem worried about something. It's in your eyes."

Her face flushed and she took off the spectacles and laid the sock aside. She did not gaze at him for a moment, and when she looked up her eyes had a hard little glint in them,—something he had never seen before. It seemed to him that a cold blast had blown between them and she was almost a different girl. Slowly the color faded from her face and there was something pathetic in her eyes. His mind leaped ahead. He had seen her as a woman and not as a laughing girl, and the change hurt him.

"Why should I be worried?" she asked in a strange voice.

"I don't know," he said slowly, "but you seem to be."

He stayed for a short time and then left her. She looked at him strangely as he stood on the steps, but he could not interpret the look. He shook her hand at parting, but the warm hand-clasp was gone and she withdrew her fingers suddenly. Then another change came over her and she followed him down the steps and walked with him to the gate. Her eyes were bright and she talked rapidly and laughed much, but somehow he could not shift and change to follow her moods, and her gaiety sounded forced and unnatural.

"There is something, something," he thought, as he gazed at her over the top of the gate.

"I know what you are thinking of," she said suddenly. "You are thinking of what you said on the porch and you are very foolish. There is nothing the matter with me. If I don't meet you with a giggle, why, you will have it that I am troubled, that I am unnatural. Do you dislike serious-minded persons so much?" she asked unexpectedly.

"Oh, we will drop it," he said. "You are all right, in any mood, but I like you best when you are like a spring morning,—all laughter and sunshine."

"Oh, I am good for a half-holiday, I know," she said, with a touch of bitterness. Then she laughed archly and the old look came into her eyes. "It's afternoon now," she said softly. "You told me once that I was like a morning-glory, and morning-glories are but transient things." He turned away with a smile.

"You are all right," he said gently. "You are always all right."

During the course of their conversation, Virginia's name had been seldom mentioned. Martin had cast again and again like an artful fisherman, always connecting Jessica with the incident inquired about. She, seeming all unconscious of this casting, turned the conversation along other lines, and when he left her, he knew but little concerning Virginia's doings or her impressions of the trip.

The next evening Martin sat for some minutes trying to decide whether he wanted to have his mare saddled or harnessed. Alabama was to be used; there was no doubt about that. Ase, who passed by, heard his master whistling softly as he sat industriously shaping his nails, and knew that the mare was to be taken out that night.

"A buggy is easier riding," Martin was thinking; "but still,"—and he laughed softly to himself,—"there is more exercise in riding and—I need the exercise."

There was another reason, possibly a foolish one, but it was of more weight with him just then than the question of exercise.

"Buggies," he was thinking, "are prosaic things. Now, who ever heard of any one's going in a buggy,—just a plain, every-day, factory-made buggy,—to—" and he shouted for Ase to rub down the mare and saddle her.

In a little while he was riding along under the starlight, weaving dreams that brought pleasure to him; building castles, oh, such castles! and their walls and turrets gleamed softly in the starlight and they were

old in story. Old in story,—but the story was one,—the one that lay in his heart and was old, so very, very old. It seemed that it had been there since time began; it had needed but her presence to waken it. In her and her alone was the quality that had been able to tint it, to breathe into it a glow of life and make it beautiful. For it was beautiful, this story; as beautiful as the great sweep of stars spread above him in the ancient sky.

Out at the hitching-post, Martin fastened his mare and, when he had entered the house, he found Walter and Jessica there. It was the first time the men had seen each other since the day of the fight under the magnolias. Walter shot Martin a quick glance as he entered and, rising, greeted him politely. Martin returned the greeting, and neither of the girls noticed the stiffness of the salutation. Jessica seemed as one struck dumb; her face grew white and there was misery in her eyes.

“Come on, Jess,” said Walter at last. “You have loafed long enough and your mother’s last words to you were that there were things to be done at home that have already been neglected too long. I promised to bring you home early.”

They all walked down to the gate and Shack brought Walter’s buggy out and waited at the hitching-post. After a few moments’ conversation, the two entered the vehicle and went whirling rapidly away.

Martin and Virginia stood for a moment gazing after them. They heard the horse’s hoofs strike the hard ground on the little rise in the road some two hundred yards away. In a few moments they heard

them cross the little bridge over the old Jackson Road, and then Virginia moved as though to return to the house.

He turned and faced her; they were standing under the shadow of a tree and a Cape Jessamine bush grew beside them. She looked up into his face without a word and saw his eager, earnest eyes fixed upon her. All the pretty speeches slipped away and he stood gazing at her in dumb, trembling worship.

"Come," she said hurriedly, "let's go in! It is chilly outside." Her voice had a strange, nervous ring, and though he had spoken never a word, he felt she knew and understood.

"Wait!" he whispered hoarsely when she turned, as though to lead the way. "I have something to say to you that I must say now." He saw her eyes grow wide at his words, and her face looked white and colorless. In that instant she looked almost old, for there was something drawn and frightened in her aspect.

Then it came to him and he told her; not with pretty words and easy-flowing speech, but with thick tongue and dry throat, laboring heavily and stumblingly, every fiber of his heart wrung with the sweetest agony. He thought, even as he was telling her, how easy it would have been, had Jessica stood in her place, to clothe his story in beautiful words and to tell her just what was in his heart.

It was certainly not a beautiful story as he told it, but every word trembled and vibrated with truth and the earnest expression of a deep and tender love. He caught her fingers, but she drew them away; they



were trembling and her body shivered as from cold. Some of his words she did not hear at all. Before her eyes there was another scene, and her thoughts were miles away.

This was the picture that came to her. The train was whirling rapidly toward Mobile. She had been reading and, having tired of that, was sitting looking out of the car window, when Jessica came and sat beside her.

"Virginia," she had said, "you and I have been living heart to heart almost from baby days, and I have something to tell you. I tell it to you, because it will make it easier for me and because you ought to know. I haven't breathed it to another soul, and I want you to swear that by neither sign, look nor word you will give even a hint that you know. Then I will tell you."

"Why, Jess!" she exclaimed, "you know I won't tell. I never betrayed a confidence in my life." She looked at her friend and saw that her eyes were bright, almost feverish, and that there was a glow on her cheeks. Jessica caught her hand and fondled it nervously.

"I know," she said, "but this time, at least, you must swear."

"If it is necessary, then I do it," said Virginia. "I swear, Jess. What is it?"

Jessica continued to stroke her hand and her eyes were cast downward.

"I have promised to marry Martin Wentworth," she said hurriedly. "He does not want it known, because we can not marry yet, His father wants him

to stay down here and work for about a year longer. When he was at college he was something of a flirt, and got into an entanglement that his people did not approve of. He says it was just for fun, though he admits he has been something of a flirt and liked to make love to girls. He says his father took it so seriously that he sent him down here to make a man of himself, and said if he heard anything about a love affair, until the time was out, he would have nothing more to do with him and would cut him off entirely and give everything to his daughter. The time will be out next year, but he said he couldn't wait any longer. We'll have to keep it dead secret, and I haven't even told mother. I want to tell you, because you can make it easier for me and, besides, Virginia, I—I am afraid of you."

Jessica bowed her head and put her handkerchief to her eyes and her body shook. The back of the seat in the sleeper was high and no one else saw. The train went rushing on with a rumbling roar, but the two were silent, and Virginia turned her head and gazed out of the window again. After a moment, Jessica dried her eyes and went to another seat, but Virginia continued to gaze out of the window, seeing all and yet realizing nothing. Still the train roared on through the lowlands, now over trestles and again past banks of evergreen plants that almost touched the windows. She took up her book and stared at its pages, but the story was forgotten and the interest gone.

She thought, too, of how Walter had come to her and asked her to plead with Jessica for him, and of

how she had refused. After what had been told her, this would have been impossible.

"Could Jessica have deliberately lied?" she asked herself now, as Martin stood watching her and waiting for a reply. And the answer came quickly: "No, she could not do it; she would not know how. And why should she lie? And why should he lie? Was he telling her this because he liked to make love to women, as Jessica had said?" She felt she could not believe it of him. A man who lies could not look as he looked. She could not believe that either of them would lie, and yet, yet— Oh, how she wanted to tell him and so learn the truth of it all! But the oath stood in her way, and she could not even hint that she knew or had been told.

"Don't!" she pleaded, and there was a little catch in her voice. "You ought not—you *must* not talk to me this way."

He seized her hands in his own and, stooping, kissed them tenderly. The hesitation was gone and he poured into her ears, with quick whispered words, the full measure of his love.

"No, no!" she cried, and drew away from him. "Don't—don't, you must not. I do not—I can not."

He stood for a moment half-stunned by her words. She saw a look of hopelessness creep into his face.

"Don't you see," she cried brokenly, "that you ought not—that I do not and can not love you? that you haven't the right—that I haven't given you the right—"

He gazed steadily into her eyes for a moment, believing that he understood.

"No," he said slowly, "you have not given me the right. You have been kind and courteous to me, but I claim nothing from that. Nevertheless, I have the right, the God-given right, to seek my happiness, and I dare to exercise it.

"There are many things in the past for which I should, perhaps, crave your pardon, but I do not ask it now. You have been gracious to me and those other days have been buried in silence. That has been evidence to me that I have been fully forgiven. Your hand has been extended to me in friendship, and I know that in your heart there is nothing but truth."

"You do not know me," she murmured so he could scarcely hear her. "No, you do not know me; there are things—"

"I do know you," he replied. "I have known you all the years of my life. In each of those whom I have strongly liked there was a grace of manner, form or speech that caught my heart. Perhaps it was but a flash of laughter, the turn of a cheek, the slow, steady gaze of an eye that could be as quick as light,—but it was the laughter I liked, the cheek that I thought beautiful, and the eye that I hoped would, on looking into my soul, see only the best of me and give the worst an opportunity to die and disappear. All the things I have loved in my heart I find gathered together in you, so you are the Queen of all of the Graces needed to make perfection in my eyes."

He caught her hands and continued gently:

"I come to you believing my heart to be clean. I love you with all my heart and will love you the rest of my life. Do you—can you care for me?"

Virginia withdrew her hands from his clasp almost in haste, lest her strength of purpose should fail her. Her breath came quickly and for a moment she did not reply.

A bitterness at the cruelty of her position swept over her and she lashed it eagerly in the wild hope that in it she might find escape. There was bitterness against Jessica, who had persuaded her to forgive the earlier days, the unfriendly days, and had at last led her into this situation. There was also a bitterness against Martin, who now subjected her to such a fearful trial. He must know that she cared for him; he must know that honor would hold her back. It was cowardly on his part to press her into a corner, to pursue her after the first answer had been given and try to drag out her heart and turn it and examine it.

She lashed this bitterness until an anger rose, and with it came words; halting they were at first, uncertain and unsteady in sound and seemingly in purpose, but in a moment she was in control of every faculty and she spoke steadily, winning her own defeat.

"So you came without apology," she said. "You came to tell me that after those other days an apology was not needed. All that is true. You say I must have forgiven you,—that, too, is true. Listen to me!

"To-night, as we stand here, friendship is no word with which to charm. The word is weak; it is bloodless; it is, as used, a term of courtesy. A seat at the table, a flower from the garden, an hour's idleness divided, a smile in passing, a gift at the wedding, a tear at the grave—friendship—the kinship of man.

Hatred is nearer to this thing of which you speak, for it at least rings true and stirs the soul.

"That I seemed to forgive you for the earlier days meant nothing more than that you might be the kind of friend I have just described. You say my heart holds nothing but truth, otherwise I could not have extended my hand to you. If you believe that,—then you may name me hypocrite.

"That most women are hypocrites is true, but they needs must be that the world may be balanced evenly—for most men are liars.

"I extended my hand to you because Jessica said it would make it easier for her, easier for you and easier for all. Frankly, I liked you. You had a candid vanity about you, and you lied to no man concerning it. To your credit I will say that you were entitled to that vanity. You carried it well and it did no harm; in some places it even amused.

"Now, there is another side to this.

"The days have passed, the weeks, the months, the years, and, suddenly, without word of warning, the friend, the friend just described, rides through the night, gazes into a woman's face, pauses, thinks for a moment, and then all at once delivers himself of a love speech."

She laughed strangely.

"She—perhaps she is an hypocrite and he—oh, well!"

She laughed again, but with unsmiling eyes, and her fingers were tightly laced together.

"I tell you, no!" she said. "You should have known the answer before you came to-night; you should

have known in your heart what the answer ought to be."

Martin stepped forward and caught her wrist, almost roughly.

"You are not telling me the truth," he said. "You are juggling with words. Do not darken yourself to save me from the shadow. I will take all the sting; tell me the truth!"

She drew back quickly. Ah, but he was plausible! No wonder Jess had believed him, for, even now, knowing the truth, she herself was tempted to believe.

"Truth," she said, "why speak of truth? It would seem that your tongue would avoid the use of that word."

Martin's face flushed and a flood of anger and shame ran through him until he felt his ears tingle and burn. He stooped quickly and picked up his hat from where he had dropped it on the grass.

"So," he said heavily, "that is the end! You are wrong; I have not been a liar,—I have been a fool. I have told you the truth,—it has been a fool's truth. Your very heartlessness has been a kindness; you were a better friend than you knew."

He turned slowly from her and Virginia started forward with a catch at her heart.

"No, no!" she cried hastily, extending her hands. There was a note of anguish in her voice. "Please understand me. Not for worlds would I wantonly hurt you. In my own heart I did not believe it, but I had a reason for saying it. Oh, I do want you to understand!"

He stood, breathing heavily, waiting. There was

silence. She moved her arms in a helpless way and clasped her hands together nervously. What could she explain? What could she say, that he might understand her conduct, without breaking faith with Jess? Nothing. She was silent.

"You had best go in now," he said hoarsely. "I shall not keep you longer or worry you further." She did not reply.

"Good-by," he continued. "Forgive me if I have disturbed you. Good-by!"

He bowed low and, turning, passed blindly out of the gate and closed it behind him. She heard his step as he walked down to where Alabama was fastened. She heard the quick whip of the rein and then the creaking of the saddle as he mounted. Once, twice, he essayed, and then she heard the mare's hoofs strike the soft earth; he was turning down to the road. Then he passed out before her and she could see him dimly. Her lips parted as though to call, and she placed her hand on the gate for support. From down the road came a clatter of hoof-beats; farther and fainter they grew, and then all was still.

"Virginia!" called Mrs. Traylor from the doorway, "why don't you and Mr. Wentworth come in? You will catch cold out there; you have nothing on your head."

She turned and with bowed head walked slowly toward the house.

"I am coming," she said, as her mother walked out on the porch.

"Why, where is Mr. Wentworth?" asked Mrs. Traylor.



"He—had—to go—back," was the labored reply.

She walked quickly past her mother and on through the house. Mrs. Traylor heard her stop at the water-pitcher for a drink. The silver goblet fell from her hand as she tried to replace it on the stand, but she let it lie where it had fallen.

"A quarrel, I suppose," thought Mrs. Traylor, and did not try to follow her. "Such things are best left alone."

Virginia made her way to her room and, after locking the door softly, walked over and lay quietly down on the bed, with her face to the wall. Not a sob came from her throat, not a tear fell from her eyes, but she lay with a dead, hopeless heart and felt that she could pray to die.

Somewhere out in the world of fancy, whose broad domains are ever about us, she seemed at last to hear music. The words of the song crept through her brain; hopeless they sounded, utterly, absolutely hopeless.

"I have just been learning the lesson of Life,  
The sad, sad lesson of loving—"

Then tears came to her,—quick, hot tears,—and she turned upon her face.

"Oh, it isn't right," she sobbed. "It isn't fair, and she ought not to have said it. I can not believe it of him; I can not believe it!" Then her face went down on the pillow and she shook in an agony of weeping.

"He thinks I mocked him—laughed in his face,—and now he hates me," she moaned. "And I couldn't explain. She had placed me so that I couldn't."

After a long while she arose, lighted the lamp and undressed. She hardly knew what she was about until suddenly she slipped down on her knees by the bedside and began her evening prayer. Broken it was, but, oh, how heartfelt! for she knelt humbly, weeping as she prayed:

“With naught but her shadowy form in the mirror  
To kneel in dumb agony down and weep near her.”

## CHAPTER XVIII

### "DE PARALYZE"

Didema and De Quina were married. Aaron Green performed the ceremony in De Quina's barber shop one evening, and there were only two or three negroes present. This was a source of bitter disappointment to her. Her own hair was long and curly, rather than kinky, but she had wanted to lead the straight-haired man down the middle of Zion Church "an' mek dem niggers turn green," as she expressed it. But De Quina had said, "No," and that ended it. She wept over it, but at last acquiesced, for she could not find strength in her heart to let "dat straight-haired man" go.

This wedding had made Shack very sad, but Didema had made herself so obnoxious to every negro on the plantation that all but her old admirer were glad that she was gone. She had bragged continually of De Quina's blue blood.

"You des wait tel me an' him gits tied up," she had said to old Ephraim a day or two before she left to obtain employment at the Brantleys', so as to be nearer the Cuban. "You des wait an' den I'll show you kinky-headed niggers dat yer ain't knee-high ter er dwarf lizard. Me an' him is gwineter

go ter Cubier, an' den I'm gwineter hab er big house, same ez er fine white lady. I show all you common niggers whut's right. When I goes er-zizzin' by in mer kerridge wid fo' hawses, yer gwineter hop outen de way in yer common rags an' den stan' 'side de road 'mongst de weeds an' dus' an' bat yer eyes an' say: 'Um-umph! I useter to know dat lady.' ”

“You is got er bubble on de brain,” said old Ephraim, staring at her in disgust. “I is seed yo' kin' biff'o', an' le' me tell yer, chil', when dat bubble bus', de water gwineter run outen yer eyes an' yer gwineter sail mighty low.”

She called him a gray-headed old fool.

“Yas,” he drawled, “I hears yer erway up dere in de ellymints, Miss Bullbat, er-hollerin' *spink, spink*, an' er-mekin' all dem sweepin' soun's, but when er little dark 'gins ter come, Miss Bullbat, she gwineter sail mighty low an' den *bang*, an' she git shot by er common ord'nary little fiel' nigger boy wid one dese here red-stock, three-dollar guns whut orter come outen er prize-box fer er nickel. Yer better come down an' light safe, so ez yer kin see whar ter go an' when ter dodge. Hit's so cool up dere whar yer is dat all yo' good manners done friz up.”

“Aw, shet up!” she retorted. “Whut come outen yo' mouf prove dat yer brains is on de wabble. I got mo' good manners an' mo' good raisin' den air nigger on dis place. Yer all is jealous an' yer meks me sick at de stummick.”

“Good manners!” he cried in a rage. “Yer doan' know no mo' 'bout good manners den er polecat do 'bout cinnermun draps.”

Didema replied with spirit, but at last old Ephraim's anger passed and he sat down on the steps near which they had been standing, shaking his head and smiling.

"Nigger," he said at last, "I sho is sorry fer yer. Youse de whole kerboodle, right now, but hit ain't gwineter be long 'fo' yer be er-settin', er-sobbin' an' er-eatin' humble-pie. Git clost down ter de groun' Dema, an' den yer kin allus look up, an' yer kin be frien'ly wid dem whut's trabblin' de road wid yer. Flyin' am mighty nice, but hit am danjus business at de las'. De feller whut stick ter de groun' an' keep er-knockin' erway at de road wid his foots, he ain't gwineter kick up no great passle er dus', an' he ain't gwineter 'track no intickler 'tention an' be no big Ike, but erway up yonder in de sky de good Gawd A'mighty am er-watchin' dat humble sparrer, an' ef he des stick strickly ter business, he gwineter do des lak dat ol' bug-song say,—he gwineter git dere all de same."

All this came back to Didema a few days after the wedding, when De Quina surprised her and made her more than indignant by suggesting that she should return to the Traylor place and go to work, and also secure him a position there.

"I ain't gwineter do nothin' uv de sort," she retorted with spirit. She was as wax in his hands in every other way, but on this question she stubbornly refused to be persuaded. She would close her eyes and refuse even to look at him when he stood pleading with her.

"I ain't gwineter do it; I ain't gwineter do it,"

was all she would say. He became verry angry and, though his speech was usually rather slow and deliberate, he managed on this occasion to hasten the flow of words and cursed her most fluently. Her only replies were tears, a stubborn shaking of the head and the oft reiterated: "I ain't gwimeter do it."

He became furious, kicked the furniture about, slammed the door and went out cursing desperately to himself. When he returned she still sat where he had left her, blubbering forlornly.

"Aw, hell!" he cried in disgust, "shut up da' wow-wow an' be de good frien'."

She thought it all over and decided it was best. He had not yet given her a beating, and that was some comfort. But even though a beating, indeed several of them, should be her portion, she did not intend to face the negroes on the plantation after all the fine airs she had indulged in just before she had left.

De Quina gave up the attempt to persuade her, as being hopeless, and seemed to reconcile himself quickly to his defeat. Boxes began to arrive at the barber's house,—boxes of various shapes and sizes, and all very heavy and very mysterious. They came in a wagon driven by two negroes, and they always came at night. It took several men to carry them up stairs, and Red Shirt was always one of the party. The others worked at the mill.

"Whut's in all dem boxes, anyhow?" asked Didema of Red Shirt one night as he brought up a box somewhat smaller than the rest and deposited it on the floor in a corner of the room.

He turned on her quickly, but, recovering his self-control, smiled mysteriously.

"Dem's lay-obers," he said.

"Lay-obers fer whut?"

"Lay-obers ter ketch meddlers," he replied with a grin.

"Aw, sho nuff," she pleaded, "whut's in dem boxes? Lope woan' tell me, an' so I'm gwineter git de hatchet an' crack one uv um open an' look sometime."

"Dem's lodge business fer de s'iety," he said earnestly, "an' doancher try ter bus' dem boxes open, 'kase, *kerzut!*"—and he drew his finger meaningly across his throat. He went out of the room and met De Quina on the stairway.

"Say," he whispered, "dat nigger got ter tek de paralyze; she talk too damn much."

So they came back together and De Quina took a little Bible and shut the door and they stood by her, watching her frightened, rolling eyes as she took "de paralyze."

"Naw," she exclaimed nervously, when it was over, "you kin promise yo' Gawd dat I doan' wanter know whut's in dem boxes. I doan' wanter be mix' up wid no lodge business."

They soon went out and left the house, and she stood for some moments listening to the sound of their departing footsteps. She gazed for a moment at the boxes. How quiet the room seemed! And yet, surely there was a stir in the corner. A puff of cold air most certainly went through the room, though everything was tightly closed. She slipped over to a closet and got out De Quina's bottle.

“I needs er dram, sho,” she muttered nervously, “mer backbone is rale col’.”

After this she swept the hearth and dusted things generally about the room, more to occupy her mind than because they needed it.

“I bet,” she said, and shuddered at the thought, “I bet dey is skilitins an’ dead mens in dem boxes, an’ I sho be glad when dey is gone.”

After a while she went to bed, being afraid to stay awake longer, and hoping she would fall asleep. It would then not be so lonely. Before lying down she placed a hatchet under her pillow, and after she had slipped between the sheets she reached up and caught a trembling grip on its handle with her right hand, and with the other she pulled the cover over her head.

“I’m boun’ I be daid fo’ Lope gits back,” she murmured with a shiver. “I ain’t erfeard uv no natchel sorter dyin’, but ef dey gits atter me, I’m sho is gwineter gib dem sperrits er hot rassle wid dis here hatchet.”

She lay for a moment silent, and then a shudder slipped over her.

“Um-umph,” she grunted, her body shaking and her teeth chattering, “dese here sheets is sho’ col’.”

The *paralyze* had done its work.



## CHAPTER XIX

### A NEW USE FOR A HATCHET

The church was completed and, on the Sunday following, the first sermon was to be preached by Aaron Green. A committee from the negroes had come to invite Martin and Mr. Oliver to attend, offering to rope off a large space for their sole use in a part of the building where they would not have to come in contact with the negroes at all. Martin thanked them, but said he did not care to go, and Mr. Oliver also declined the invitation.

Martin had been nowhere since that night at the Traylor plantation, not even to call on Jessica Brantley. He was utterly wretched and soon made up his mind to go away. He owned some stock in the company, and his father owned a great deal more, but as he sat looking out of the window at the great buildings, he felt that he hated them and all they contained. He wanted to get away,—away where he would never see her again nor hear her name mentioned. She had not only rejected him, but had laughed at him, had mocked him heartlessly and cruelly. Had she simply rejected him, it would have been different; he might have won her over, or he might eventually have ceased to love her; but to mock him, to laugh in his face! Ye gods! but

it was too much; it was more than he could stand. He strode angrily up and down the floor of his room, his cheeks flushed and his eyes bright. At last he sat down and impetuously wrote out his resignation as secretary and treasurer of the company. "To take place at once, or as soon as you can secure another man," he wrote. The company had been incorporated in Michigan, and his resignation had to go before the board of directors there.

The following morning, which was Sunday, when he told Mr. Oliver what he had done, the latter was dumfounded.

"Why, what on earth is the matter, Martin?" he asked.

"I'm tired of it," he replied.

"Tired? Come, that won't do. Take a rest and go home on a visit and then come back. You are making a big mistake."

"No," said Martin firmly. "I've quit."

"Have you anything else in view?" asked Mr. Oliver.

"No, I have not," he replied. "I have saved about four-fifths of my salary since I have been here, and I suppose I can start at something."

"What will your father think of this?" asked Mr. Oliver kindly. "He sent you here because he wanted you to learn the business, and what do you suppose he will say to it?"

"I don't know," was the mournful reply.

"Say, Martin," cried Mr. Oliver, "this business won't do. It is foolishness, and you are not doing yourself any good by it. I am going to have other interests

to look after before long, and if you stayed here you would no doubt get the presidency." He gazed at Martin strangely and then smiled: "Come, now, what's the trouble?" he said.

Martin's face flew crimson; he imagined Mr. Oliver suspected the true cause of his trouble.

"Come," continued the latter, still smiling, "let it out now! What is it?"

The young man whirled on him, quivering with anger.

"It's none of your business," he cried. "If I want to quit, why, I'll quit; do you understand that?" And he glared at the president as he stood over him.

"So-o-o!" exclaimed Mr. Oliver, and whistled softly. "She gave you a hard fall, did she? Which one was it? I think you are right," he continued, without waiting for a reply. "I don't think you will be fit for work for some time."

Martin strode angrily out of the room and slammed the door viciously behind him. Mr. Oliver laughed softly.

"Poor boy!" he thought to himself. "I suppose he has had a pretty hard time of it down in these woods." He gazed slowly around at the walls of the room. "My duties call me away frequently, but he doesn't get many chances to get away. College men can't stand it. I can't figure him out, though. He comes in one time with his face punched black and blue and won't tell a thing about it. He mopes around with that for a while and then he gets happy again and whistles and sings for a day or two. Then he changes again without getting his face punched and

wants to quit." He sat for some moments thinking. "It's one or the other of them, but I can't tell which. I wish he would marry one of them, because I simply can not get along without him."

He walked over to the window and saw Martin coming out of the tool-house with a hatchet in his hand.

"Wonder what he intends to do with that, now?" thought Mr. Oliver. "It's a clumsy thing for either assassination or suicide."

Martin went striding angrily toward the river and Mr. Oliver turned once more to his desk and soon forgot the incident. He stuffed Martin's resignation into a pigeonhole. "I'll hold it for a few days," he told himself, "and see if he can not be made to repent. If he does not, then I'll have to file it, with the request that it be rejected and he be given a vacation."

Down at the river Martin entered his boat and pulled quickly across. Then he climbed the bluff and, with long, swinging strides, set out through the woods toward the north. As he passed the island he could hear Aaron Green preaching, but he paused only an instant and then continued on his way. At last he reached the little knoll and the letters carved on the beech came to his view. A sense of shame stole over him that he had ever been so weak, so utterly childish and silly as to do such a thing. He walked quickly to the tree and raised the hatchet to chop away the initials. Then his arm slowly fell and a lump gathered in his throat.

"I can't do it!" he exclaimed. "It seems like killing something." He had carved it there lovingly and

reverently and now he had come, almost with hate in his heart, to cut it away. Martin sat down on a log and inspected his handiwork for some time. The letters were now brown, and looked old and weatherbeaten.

Finally he rose with a sigh.

"I can't help it," he cried aloud. "I'd cut it off if it were inked on my arm, and so it must be done."

He rose while the mood was on him and, lifting the hatchet, drove it into the bark with a dull whack. The first cut having been made, the rest was easier, and soon nothing remained to tell his story. There was a broad, white scar on the beech and a few chips on the ground, and that was all. As he regarded it, a mist crept before his eyes.

"I wouldn't have believed it of you, little girl!" he murmured brokenly. "I wouldn't have believed you had the heart! I wouldn't have believed it!"

He cast his glance over the whole field of vision. How melancholy it all seemed! but soon he would leave it for ever. Soon the great pine forest, whose giants sighed and moaned together, would know him no more. And here he had buried his heart, and he felt he would never love again. He turned his face to the south and began to walk slowly along. When he reached a spot opposite the island he paused to listen to the sounds issuing from the church. The preacher had closed his sermon and the negroes were about to sing their last song. Soon the old plantation melodies, the rhythmical chants, and the banjo-playing would all be left behind.

He sat down and listened to the song they were beginning to sing. It was a new one to him and,

though he had often heard them singing strange things and had become somewhat used to it, still this one caught his attention from the first, as it was wafted up to him. In a strong, high voice some man raised the tune and led it all the way through the song.

“Mistress Mary, she had one er golding chain;  
 Mistress Mary, she had one er golding chain;  
 ’Twuz er golding er chain wid er evvy link in de Jesis name  
 An’ dere am er rer no hidin’ er place down dere, Miss Mary,  
 Dere am er rer no hidin’ er place down dere.

O-o-h sinner man, min’ how yer tread on de cross;  
 O-o-h sinner man, min’ how yer tread on de cross;  
 O-o-o-h sinner man, min’ how yer tread on de cross,  
 Fer yer foot mout slip an’ yer soul git los’,  
 An’ dere am er rer no hidin’ er place down dere.

O-o-h I went ter de rock fer ter hide my face  
 An’ de rock cried out: ‘No hidin’ place!’  
 Dere am er rer no hidin’ er place down dere, Miss Mary,  
 Dere am er rer no hidin’ er place down dere.

O-o-h er sinner man, er settin’ on de gates uv hell,  
 De gate flew open an’ de sinner man fell;  
 Dere am er rer no hidin’ er place down dere, Miss Mary,  
 Dere am er rer no hidin’ er place down dere.

O-o-h er some come er cripple an’ er some come er lame  
 An’ er some come er hoppin’ in de Jesis’ name;  
 Dere am er rer no hidin’ er place down dere, Miss Mary,  
 Dere am er rer no hidin’ er place down dere.”

The last mournful wail of the song died away and Martin sat dumfounded. He felt somehow that Aaron Green had never given out that song for them to sing.

He was a man of education and surely could not countenance such stuff as that. But Aaron Green sat in the pulpit with his head back against the wall, industriously mopping his face and gazing out at the greasy, shining countenances of his congregation. Little cared he what they sang, for his mind and his heart were far away. He knew the song was theirs, and, having chosen it, they would not be denied the pleasure of singing it. Their "seekin'" as they called it when they began to ponder long and deeply over religion, and their "comin' thu" when they felt they had been converted, were part and parcel of their method of doing things, and he neither dared nor cared to tamper with it. Martin rose and walked slowly away.

"Give those people ten years to themselves, entirely away from white people, and they will be eating one another," he was thinking.

The negroes had begun to file out of the church and when he had reached his boat and crossed the river he met Didema arrayed in her finest apparel, returning to Granville.

"Where is that Lopez de Quina, your husband?" he asked.

"Law!" she exclaimed. "Lope, he wudden go ter dat chutch. He 'low he Cat'lick an' cain' come here. He say ef he come here er man name' Pope gwineter write him er letter an' cuss him out. Him an' Red Shirt bofe 'lows dat, an' ez fer me I des come ter see whut dat pole-house gwineter look lak. Ef hit wuzn't fer dat big cross on top, hit would look lak er monst'us tucky pen. Dese here mill niggers, dey gibbs me de fros' look an' I ain't er-comin' back no

mo'. Dey's too brash fer me, an' dey ain't nothin' but common scrubs nohow. Dey ain't nairy lady in dat bunch."

Martin started away, but Didema called after him in a rather wistful tone:

"How's Miss Ferginia? ef yer been dere lately. I ain't seed her fer some time merse'f."

"I don't know," he replied, as he went on his way. "I don't see her often. And I hope I'll never see her again," he added fiercely under his breath as he walked into the yard and entered the house.



## CHAPTER XX

### "DE SIGNS AN' DE FO' SIGNS"

When Virginia saw Jessica again it was at the Traylor home. She walked impulsively up to her visitor, her heart full of self-reproach for her recent unkind thoughts concerning her dearest friend, and, throwing her arms about her neck, kissed her several times. Then human nature proved too much and she promptly burst into tears.

"Why, what on earth?" exclaimed Jessica.

She received no reply and so she, too, began to weep and also to comfort. Finally, being uninformed as to the cause of it all, her friendly fund of tears ran a bit low. She looked up with glistening eyes and sniffed sympathetically a few times. Not for a moment did she suspect the real cause of the trouble. She felt that Virginia had been astounded at the information imparted to her on the trip to Mobile and had possibly not been entirely pleased at the arrangement, but many and many a night she had lain awake, thinking over it all and fortifying herself in the belief that Virginia could not doubt her. Had she not been entirely fair, even in her deception? Had she not told Virginia for Virginia's own sake? So it was that fear tapped not at her door, remorse with-

ered at the steady glance of purpose, and only memory, "the soul's cup-bearer," mixed for her on sleepless nights a bitter draft. Of late there had been sorrow, because he came no more, but she knew he had not been with Virginia. Perhaps some secret grief troubled her friend, so her heart was as sympathetic as of old.

"Say, dear, what is the matter with you?" she asked.

"A case of—of—nerves, I think," was the broken reply.

"Well," said Jessica, "this is a regular sobbing bee; let's quit!"

"All ri-ght, I'm quit-it-ting," came hesitatingly from between Virginia's fingers.

"Whew!" murmured Mistress Jessica, "I had to quit. I don't think I have any more left."

Virginia snickered hysterically as she mopped her eyes.

"Do-on't wa-aste your sup-up-ply on my ac-count," she said. "I'm ju-ust sill-illy, that's all! I'm gla-ad you came."

Soon their tears were dried and they sat talking and planning. Jessie finally glanced closely at Virginia's face.

"Goodness me!" she exclaimed. "Let's go wash our faces. That cry certainly made you look peaked. Why," she added, "you look perfectly desperate out of the eyes."

They went to Virginia's room, where they dabbled cold water on their faces, while they talked about hats.

"Now," said Jessie, with a final sniff, "I don't like

the way that Miss Smarty in Mobile fixed the plumes on my hat. I told her it wouldn't do, but she grew high and mighty and insisted it would. I tried it on this morning and, honestly, that long plume that dangles down over my left eye makes me jump every time I take a step. I am going to change it, and I brought it out for you to help me."

She went out and brought in the box and they sat together examining the handiwork of the Miss Smarty of Mobile. Suddenly Jessie laid the hat aside and, dropping down on her knees, reached up and caught her friend's face between her hands.

"Look here now, beautiful," she whispered softly, "you've been worrying about something. I know you have and you can't hide it from me. Tell Jess what it is, and maybe we can straighten it out together. Maybe I can help you, and you know I confide in you."

She stroked Virginia's cheek, and she, in turn, smoothed back Jessica's hair and kissed her white forehead softly.

"No," said Virginia slowly, "you can't help me, dear, and it really doesn't amount to anything much, any more. We can imagine troubles," she continued, as she turned her head and gazed far out toward the distant woods.

"Well, don't cry about it any more then, pet," said Jessie, as she rose to her feet. Virginia was silent and her friend took up the hat and began to examine it critically.

"Speaking of crying reminds me," said Jess. "It seems that nearly all the women I know have been

crying recently, but none of them will explain. Mammy Mandy was crying the other day and I asked her what was the matter and she said: 'Nothin' 'tall, honey, I des er-weepin'.' 'What are you weeping about?' I asked her. 'I des drowndin' sin,' she said. I asked her to explain, but she got out of it by giving me the benefit of some of her peculiar ideas."

"She and Uncle Eph amusé me when they meet," said Virginia. "He can usually get away with her, for she gets angry when she can't keep up."

"Then there's Didema, too," said Jess. "She came to the house this morning and asked if she might go to my room. I let her go and she flopped right down on the floor and began to blubber. For a long while I couldn't get any sense out of her at all, except that she seemed to be mortally afraid of that barber. I would have sent her out, but for the fact that she sat rocking backward and forward, sobbing and moaning and looking so pitiful. I asked her if he had given her a beating and she replied he had not. Her trouble seems to be more fear than anything else. Something is on that girl's mind, but when I tried to find out what it was, she only wailed and moaned: 'I des wants ter git clost ter yer 'kase I is so lonespun.' I let her sob it out and when she had finished, she went out of the room. In a moment or two she came back and wanted to kiss my hand. She seemed to get some sort of satisfaction out of it, so I let her do it. Then she washed her face in the kitchen and went down street seeming, outwardly at least, as bright as a May day."

"She has certainly fallen from her high estate," said Virginia. "For fully two weeks before she left here to

go and work for you, so she might be nearer that barber she was going to marry, she tried to play the high and mighty around the other negroes and they wouldn't stand it."

They sat for some time working at the hat.

"I'm afraid to suggest about those plumes," said Virginia. "Suppose you wait and when we get to Richmond you can have it fixed there."

But Jess would not wait. She snipped the threads fearlessly and then set about arranging it again.

"Plumes should not be placed in front," she said. "A hat with plumes should only be worn *en voiture*, therefore they should be so placed that the breeze will not uncurl them quickly. Balzac says they should only be worn *en voiture*, and surely he must have known, for he lived in Paree, Paree! The result of this knowledge on my part, Miss Traylor, is this!"—and she held up the hat with the feathers trailing out behind.

"Oh, that won't do!" said Virginia. "The brim isn't wide enough for that. The plumes need to be farther in front, so as to help the hat out in width."

"Well, I'll just fix it to suit myself then," said Jessica, and the work began again. The result was that the particular plume complained of at last found a resting-place in almost the same position it had occupied in the beginning. Jessica tried on the hat before a mirror.

Suddenly she turned and looked out of the window.

"Why, there's Uncle Eph now," she said. "Heyo, Uncle Eph!"

The old negro, who was passing through the yard, turned and, lifting his hat, made a profound bow.

"Thank yer, ma'am," he said.

"How are you, Uncle Eph?" she asked, as she drew up a chair and sat down by the window.

"Oh, I is des sorter middlin'," he replied. "Des sorter middlin'. I doan' hatter ax how you is," he continued with a smile. "I kin look at dem eyes; dey is shinin' bright an' dey is des ez blue ez dese here ragged-robins whut blooms in de yard." He paused a moment. "An' yer got dem peach blooms in yer cheeks same ez usual. Hit's de fall uv de year, but yer allus carryin' spring-time wid yer. Hit ain't quite so plain sence yer been ter Mobile. I spec maybe de railroad an' de big town sorter pale um out er little bit. All de same, dey show dat yer happy an' de worl' am er-runnin' smooove wid yer. Dat allus show in de face putty much an' when de heart's all right den de worl' come mighty nigh bein' all right, des lak hit say in de song:

"Dey is honey at de finish  
An' dey's honey at de start,  
An' dey's honey all de way  
When dey's honey in de heart."

Here old Ephraim described another courtly bow and smiled with pleasure at his own speech.

"I am afraid you are a flatterer, Uncle Eph," said Jessica, laughing softly. His face took on a reproachful look.

"Yer ort not ter tell me dat, 'kase yer doan' ornstan' mer style," he said. "Now, des look at my young mistis er-settin' dere by yer. Yer ain't hear me sayin' nothin' ter her 'bouten no peach blooms. Up tel lately, she been ez pert ez er cricket, but now she des

set an' look erway off yonder lak she studyin' somp'n in de sperrit country. Lawdy, Lawdy!" he continued mournfully, looking up at Virginia. "I neber did 'low dat yer gwineter treat me datter way. De wuz er time," he said plaintively, "yas, ma'am, de wuz er time when po' ol' Unc Ephraham could des set still when yer had trubbles an' be satisfy dat terreckly here yer gwineter come an' bus' out wid hit. An' den he could sorter setch eroun' an' light on ter some way ter settle hit. Now, yer des sets an' looks outen de winder an' I doan' hear dat pianny no mo', an' I doan' hear dem songs no mo', an' I des has ter fiddle an' fool roun' de yard tryin' ter git er peep at yer an' den git up some sorter business fer ter mek yer talk."

Virginia smiled fondly down at him.

"Why," she said, "I'll go and play some for you right now, if you want me to."

His face brightened up at once and she led Jessica to the front parlor where the piano stood, while old Ephraim went round and sat down on the front porch close to the window.

"That was just a trick of his to get me to play," she said to Jessica, and then a little feeling of despair slipped over her. "I am beginning to lie to her already," she thought. She opened the window and the old negro turned and faced them.

"What shall I play or sing for you, Unc Eph?" she asked. He closed his eyes and leaned back in the chair. He was silent a long time and she waited patiently. At last he opened his eyes and said in a husky tone:

"Play 'bout Nickerdemus, please, ma'am."

Virginia was surprised at his request. It had been

many years since she had sung the song, and he had never before expressed a liking for it. She turned to the piano and began to sing:

"Nicodemus, the slave, was of African birth,  
And was bought for a bagful of gold;  
He was reckoned as part of the salt of the earth,  
But he died years ago, very old.

'Twas his last sad request, so we laid him away  
In the trunk of an old hollow tree.  
'Wake me up!' was his charge, 'at the first break of day.  
Wake me up for the great jubilee!'"

When she had finished, she looked out and the old darky's eyes were wet with tears.

"Hit puts me ter min' uv Ni-jim," he said brokenly.

Virginia played and sang several other pieces and then she and Jessica went out on the porch and old Ephraim took his seat on the steps just below them and talked to them.

"Dey is cur'us doin's er-gwine on eroun' here, cur'us doin's," he said at last, wagging his head solemnly.

"What are they?" asked Jessica.

"Wall, I been er-bruisin' roun' er right smart lately an' I ain't satisfy in mer min'. No'm, I ain't satisfy in mer min'."

"Satisfied about what?" queried Virginia.

"Young mistis," he said sadly, "I ain't gwineter 'sturb nobody's min' 'bout nothin', but I been er-studyin' 'bout er heap er business lately. Dis day hit's been thirty-six year sence my marster freed me fer savin' uv his little boy. I div' six time an' I couldn' git



him, but de next time wuz de lucky number an' I fotch him up an' he got all right. 'Twuz den my marster sez ter me, sez he, 'Ehpraham, yer is er free nigger.' An' den he mek out de papers 'cordin' ter law an' I wuz free. My marster, he got shot endurin' uv de war right at de fus' part. He wuz wid Gin'l Bee an' got shot in de lung at de fus' Manassus. Dey fotch him home on er furlough an' I went ter nuss him an' he die in bed, while dese here two han's wuz er holdin' him up. Dat man, he went ter Glory er-fightin' Yankees in er dream. Atter dat I useter sorter go roun' ter see how de little boy gittin' on, but he ketch de brain fever bimeby an' he doan' las' no time er tall. Den de widder, she went back som'ers ober in Georgy, whar she been bawn, an' dat's 'bout de las' I knows uv um. My folks up in Ferginny had done all die out an' scatter roun' an' dat how come I got ter be sol' down in dis country. Look lak whenever er fambly whut I 'long ter git busted up, I hatter go wid de gal side. Dat all done been so long dat I is mos' fergot, but atter I wuz sol' out f'um Ferginny, I didn' keer much erbout nothin' seppen mer wife an' Polly tel I got free." He sat for some moments swinging his hat against his knee.

"I 'lowed hit wuz putty good business ter be er free nigger," he said meditatively, "an' I reckon maybe hit am. Den dere wuz mer gal, Polly, she wuz still in slabery an' yo' gran'pa, young mistis, he go an' pay de cash fer her when she an' Ni-jim tuk er notion ter git tied up. Ni-jim sot er heap er sto' by yer gran'pa, young mistis; he sho did. An' Ni-jim tol' me dat he didn' keer nothin' 'bout no freedom long ez he cain'

git back ter Affiky no mo’. An’ den Polly, she up an’ say dat ez long ez de slabery business fetch de grub an’ de close an’ pay de doctor an’ keep Ni-jim live, she ain’t see no use er-talkin’ ’bout bein’ free. Den she go on out de room er-singin’ lak er markin’-bird an’ Ni-jim he up an’ laugh an’ cackle lak he ez happy ez er june-bug. Dat whut gib me de fus’ jolt erbout de freedom business,” he said. “I had done ’lowed my marster had done gib me er whole gol’ min’, but dem two, dey des laff lak I totin’ roun’ er sack er san’. An’ den,” he continued, “hit look lak all mer strings wuz done too loose an’ didn’ nobody seem ter keer ef I libe er ef I lights out an’ dies. Dat gib me ernudder sot-back atter I done had er sick spell.

“Yas,” he said slowly; “dem wuz times when evvy-body had er heart ez big ez yer haid.”

He bowed his head and wagged it mournfully from side to side.

“An’ den,” he said thoughtfully, “dey wuz er heap er business atter dat endurin’ uv an’ right recent atter de war times whut mek dis nigger soak in whut little sense he got.”

“What, for example?” asked Virginia.

“Wall, dere wuz Ni-jim, he sorter open mer eyes dat las’ night when he come ter mer house in dem sad times. Ni-jim he ’low dat he gwine erway an’ dat I got ter come an’ tek keer uv dis here place an’ dat I got ter tek keer de white folks when dey come back an’ dat I got ter be dey nigger in his place slap tel he come back or else sen’ word. He ’low dat ef I doan’ mek dat promus dat night, he gwineter kill me, an’ dat ef I bre’k dat promus atter he maybe daid an’ gone he

sperrit gwineter come back an' ha'nt me plumb tel Judgment Day. De niggers wuz mighty bad in dem times, mighty bad, an' he say I got ter perdeck de white folks gin de niggers an' keep de niggers outen de big house tel he come back er he white folks come. He sho wuz orful-lookin' dat night, orful, orful!" he moaned, covering his face with his hands and shaking his head.

"Why, I always thought you stayed here because you wanted to stay," said Virginia in a grieved voice. She was really hurt at the old negro's story. "I never knew before that you felt you had to stay."

"I didn' at de bery fus'," he said quickly, "but den mer heart, hit got sot an' I spec ef yer pa had er runned me offen de place, I'd er died. I ain't complainin'. I is er gittin ol' an' feeble an' I soon be ergwine ter mer Jesis Marster, but I ain't er complainin', 'kase yer all is sho been good ter me. Yer sho is. Evvy year whut roll roun' yer pa been er-puttin' erway mer wedges an' I wouldn' tek um. He des keep er-puttin' um erway an' now I done had Squire Bell write up er paper whut I gwineter do wid all dat money atter you is done married an' maybe I is done daid."

There was a sad smile on his lips as he turned his face up to her.

"You ain't gwineter git hit, young mistis, so dey ain't no use in yo' 'fuzin' ter tek de money, 'kase yer ain't gwineter git hit nohow. Dat's er secrit twix me an' de squire, but I gwineter git er little satisfaction, anyhow, doan' keer ef I is daid an' gone."

He turned once more and stared across the fields that lay on the other side of the road.

"Dis whole worl' gittin' sad," he murmured. "Hit gittin' so sad." His gaze wandered off to the woods. "De trees, dey gittin' yaller an' dey gittin' red an' dey drappin' de leabes. Den de folks, dey is all er-gittin' sad. I done see war times an' starvashun times an' po' craps an' Gov'mint sojers an' cotton-worms, an' folks er-dyin', an' cyarpet-baggers, an' Kuklux an' mighty nigh evvy sorter orful business whut dey is, but I sorter got er long. Now hit look lak sump'n stuck in mer chis' an' hit ain't nothin' but trubble, trubble, trubble!"

"Why, I don't see anything to trouble you," said Virginia.

He turned his eyes on her and blinked them slowly.

"I reckon not," he murmured. "No'm, I reckon not."

"Well, what trouble are you having then?" she asked.

"Listen!" he said in an awed tone. "Ni-jim done come back."

The two girls gazed at him in astonishment.

"When?" gasped Virginia.

"Not datter way," he hastened to explain. "Not in de bone an' marrer; hit's wusser'n dat. He done come back in de ghos' an' sperrit!"

"When did that happen?" asked his young mistress, not choosing to express her doubt.

"Oh, dat been some time," he said. "He come ter mer cabin one dark night an' I heerd chains er-rat-tlin' an' he snarl lak der dawg. Den I knows dat som-ers in de worl' whar he buried, he got chains on he laigs an' on he arms. Gawd Hisse'f, I reckon' He de onlies one whut know whar dat mout be. Den I fin'

out dat he ain't neber deliber dat letter whut he wuz sen' wid, an' he call ter min' whut he say de night he lef'. He tol' me 'bout hit dat time, an' now, f'um time ter time atter dis, he gwineter come an' rattle dem chain, an' den when de 'septed time come, he gwineter rattle um three time an' den I got ter do erbout an' ef I doan' do erbout den mer soul hit gwineter go er siz-  
lin' ter Fiddler's Green."

"Why," exclaimed Jessica thoughtlessly, "it may have been a dog sure enough that came to your cabin. He may have had a block and chain." The old negro rose quickly.

"I'm er-gwine," he said angrily. Then he retorted: "I doan' reckon I knows er dawg f'um er nigger, does I?" He stopped short in his speech.

"Skuse me, please, ma'am," he said humbly. "I lak ter uv fergit mer manners."

"That's all right," she said. "Tell us more about Ni-jim."

"No'm," he replied slowly. "I cain' tell no mo'. Dat's all I kin mek public right now, but I knows de balance. Yas, ma'am, I knows de balance."

He walked slowly down the steps and then stood turning his hat dreamily in his hands.

"De signs an' de fo'signs," he murmured in a low voice. "De signs and de fo'signs. Gawd he'p us all." And, sighing deeply, he walked slowly away.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE SON OF NI-JIM

It was November. Down in the swamps, the sloe-black fruit of the palmetto, gleaming out from between bending and rusty fan leaves, proclaimed it. The twisted orchid, that had closed half its dolphin-shaped blossoms, mourned it with drooping head. The lean razor-backed hog, that plowed its way through drifts of dead leaves, grunted satisfaction at its advent over each falling acorn and half-buried scaly-bark. On the hillsides the tall hickories, whose branches, for want of space, had taken on a circular growth, stood heavily clad in coats of brown.

The beeches had launched the leaves from the upper branches to sail and whirl away in the first chill gust of October and now stood all naked-armed, shaking their ragged skirts from about them with rustling shudders. Here and there something flamed upon a hillside, something goldened in a hollow, but the magnolia, the holly, the bay-tree and the bowers of smilax, with but a few companions, stared with lonely impudence from out the world of brown and, with each whirl of wind, seemed to flaunt their green existence and gleam their deathless cheer that they might be remembered when the Yuletide days came in.

Plowing along through the drifts of fallen leaves, his heart as heavy with memories of the past and as hopeful of the future as the melancholy woodland through which he was trudging, Red Shirt took his way on one of the first bright days in November.

He took but little note of the scenes about him, yet realized it all in a dumb, dreary way. Once he encountered a bent huckleberry bush, its black stem leaning toward him and its scraggy crown bowing and swaying from side to side in the wind like the shaggy head of a threatening buffalo. He regarded it with interest for a moment and then passed on.

It was now fully a month since Red Shirt had worked at the mill. He had complained of a "chis' misery" and as "chis' miseries" are not conducive to hard manual labor on the part of the person so afflicted, Martin was not sorry when he left.

Each day when the weather permitted, he had taken his way through the woodland back of the bluff until he came to a point opposite the island, and there each day he sat silent as a statue, gazing down on the log church and dreaming. Each night he crept around through the cluster of negro cottages and attended the meeting of the society.

On this particular day, he seated himself as usual and waited. After a while, he heard the sound of footsteps crushing the dry leaves and there came the approaching murmur of voices. In a few moments he was joined by De Quina and Aaron Green and the three sat for a little while gazing across at the rough building in silence. Finally the preacher turned to Red Shirt.

“Our friend De Quina and I,” he said, “have been talking the matter over. The members of the society have forms and passwords, but they understand nothing. They know that the organization has been instituted to be used against the white man and they believe it will, in some way, which they as yet know nothing of, better their own condition. We have got to work this thing gradually, for the society, as it stands to-day, is a dish-water affair and we shall have to get everything in shape to change it to what we want, and we must also cut out the faint-hearted. De Quina and I must be fortified on every proposition and this is especially necessary in my case, for I shall have the talking to do, and questions may be embarrassing. Lying is a great thing, but when three men are trying to work in harmony, they must tell the same lie, otherwise they will fail. Suppose you tell us all about it and we three can then decide whether it is best to tell them the truth or, in fact, just what to tell them. When we spring it on them, they may want proof and we must know ourselves just what the facts are, so we can be prepared with truth or lies as the case may require.”

Red Shirt leaned forward and, drawing a huge knife from his pocket, cut a twig from a bush and began to clip it off slowly inch by inch. Finally he raised his head.

“You t’ink bes’ I tell you?” he asked.

“Yes,” was the reply. “Tell us all. We three are in it together and each of us should know all, so that we can shape our plans with intelligence and make no mistakes.”



Again he clipped a twig and whittled it slowly to bits as he had done the other.

"Maybe so hit bes'," he said at last. Then he began to speak slowly and brokenly.

"Him long, long time ergo," he said. "At de fus' part, hit all big dream, putty mix, putty fergit. I can bes' tell ter begin, whut Ni-jim, de king, he say."

So he related the story, the earlier part being rather an account of what Ni-jim, his father, had told him, than what he himself remembered.

On a dark night Ni-jim had come for him and, after talking for some time with Ephraim, had taken him on his back and they had hurried away through the darkness. For two days they traveled, journeying along light sandy roads toward the south and passing through immense pine forests. Ni-jim carried with him such food as they needed, and on the afternoon of the second day they came to Pensacola. Here great crowds of negroes had congregated, having followed in the wake of the Federal troops that had streamed southward from many directions, after organized resistance on the part of the Confederates had ceased. At sight of the water, Ni-jim wept and talked to himself in a strange language, which the boy could not understand.

As they stood gazing out toward Santa Rosa Island, a man in uniform came up and asked them what they wanted there. Ni-jim explained that he had an important letter which he desired to send to Boston. The man pointed to a vessel lying against the wharf, said it was his own and that he was about to sail for Boston. He offered to deliver the letter, but Ni-jim,

after considering the matter, shook his head. He would trust no one with the message that had been given him. He felt that the only safe and certain way to insure its delivery was to take it to Boston himself. He had money which his master had given him, and this would be more than sufficient to pay his fare to that city and to secure his return passage. He refused to deliver it to the stranger or even to let him see it.

The man then told him that the Yankees were taking all the negroes to Boston who desired to go; that those who remained in the South would each be given forty acres of land and a mule, but that those who went to Boston would be feasted by the people and would receive large sums of money. He stated that his vessel was in the Government service and that if Ni-jim and his son wanted to go, he would take them to Boston free of charge and feed them on the trip. There was to be a Freedom Dance on board that night and a large number of negroes had been invited. They would steam about the bay on a pleasure trip, have music and dancing and plenty of refreshments, and would, after some hours, return to the wharf and leave for Boston next day. All those who might care to go could remain on the vessel for the night.

Ni-jim considered the matter and then shook his head and the two walked away. All the afternoon they wandered about the town and in the evening they came back. A band was playing and the two stood listening to the music. Crowds of negroes were streaming on board. They were all from somewhere up in

Alabama or Georgia, and had followed the troops to the town. As each went on board he was questioned, and if he lived in Pensacola, he was put aside. The Pensacola negroes were told that their dance would be given later at the principal hotel of the town and they consequently took their rejection good-naturedly. Ni-jim watched them and listened to the music, but just before the gang-plank was drawn in, he took little Jim in his arms and they went on board.

Around the bay the vessel steamed, the band playing, and dancing and shouting going on. Food was served to the negroes and whisky, in unlimited quantities, was free. In a short while, fully half of them were drunk and shouting that they wanted to go to Boston and get the money that would be given them. They continued to drink and, by midnight, drunken men and women were sprawling everywhere and most of the others were reeling about, howling maudlin songs and hardly knowing what they were doing. Ni-jim sat upon the deck, his sleeping boy on his knees and his inscrutable face showing neither pleasure nor disgust at the orgy that was going on all about him.

About one o'clock, the steamer slowed down, the members of the band crept down a rope-ladder to a small boat and put off in the darkness. Then the steamer turned her nose to the Gulf and when daylight came land was no more in sight. The sleeping negroes had all disappeared. They had gone to their rooms, so an officer said, and he came to Ni-jim and offered to conduct him to his state-room below. The African rose and followed him down a narrow stair-

way, little Jim, his eyes big with fear of the sea, clinging closely to him. In an instant Ni-jim found himself handcuffed and shackled, but realizing what they had done, he gave a howl of rage and tore the cuffs apart with a mighty strain of his arms. Many strong men seized him and, bellowing like some wild bull, he was borne to the deck. Then, by an almost superhuman effort, he wrenched himself loose and, throwing the men aside, sprang to his feet. In an instant he was struck a violent blow on the head and, when he regained consciousness, he found himself chained to a ring in a chamber of darkness. The horror of it all came over him, for the odor of the slave-ship was about him and he knew he was again being borne to strange lands to undergo a life of servitude for he knew not whom. Then it was that he raved, sometimes foaming at the mouth and tugging at the chain which no mortal could break, and cursing always.

The little negro lay beside him, weeping with fright and listening to his ravings. The days went by, but days and nights were all the same, for no light came to the imprisoned negroes, though fresh air in abundance was admitted from somewhere above. Ni-jim would eat nothing and lay hour after hour as silent as death. The frightened whimperings of the boy hardly attracted his attention, but sometimes he would rouse himself from his stupor, pat the boy's head with his great rough hand, and then rave and curse until his voice failed him and he was forced to relapse into silence. In a leathern belt about his waist, next to his skin, Ni-jim still had the letter. This receptacle had been given him by Ephraim on the night of his

departure, he having made it as a present for Mr. Traylor, to be used as a money-belt.

One night the rocking and pitching of the vessel ceased and the negroes knew she had anchored somewhere. Men came below with long chains and the prisoners were led up on deck by dozens and were then put ashore. The spot was a little village on a strange coast and, in a short time after they had been landed, the good ship that had brought them took on water and provisions and, filling her bunkers with coal, turned out to sea, so that her trip to the city of Boston might not be further delayed. Away she steamed to the land where freedom was preached and soldiers had been levied to die for it, that her cargo might be discharged and she might return again to the dark land where slavery had been a curse and a monstrous sin in the eyes of God, and give to the down-trodden race another Freedom Dance.

"You won't be lonesome long," the captain called with a rough laugh as the last of the mournful troop staggered down the gang-plank. "A cargo from Mobile and one from New Orleans will soon be here. I'll bring a load from Charleston myself on my way back from Boston."

The negroes were hurriedly carried far into the interior of the country and there separated into small lots. Ni-jim and his son were sold together and a large sum of money was realized from the sales. Ni-jim did not understand the language and did not know what country he was in until he had been there for some months. One day he heard two men conversing in English and, upon inquiring of

them, learned that he was in Brazil; but this only made things seem darker to him than before. He had no idea of distances, but it was soon made plain to him that the chances of escape and of continuing his journey to Boston were almost beyond hope. He found that one of the men was a Southerner who had come to Brazil after the war. All his property had been destroyed by soldiers, and a fortune in cotton had been burned through utter wantonness and vandalism. He had now come to another country to begin life anew. Ni-jim related his story to the man and asked his aid, but he, being filled with bitterness over his losses, mocked the negro and told him he had been rightly served for having trusted a Yankee. He added, to make sure he might not be misunderstood, that he wished the ship had gone down, negroes, Yankees and all.

Ni-jim turned away at this rebuff; his hope was gone. The two had been bought by a Venezuelan who had lately come to Brazil and who had taken them farther into the interior.

The years passed by and Ni-jim and his son worked in the fields with other slaves, armed guards being stationed at every point at which they could escape. Being the only negroes on that plantation who spoke English, they had but little to do with the others; but each night Ni-jim talked with Jim about his history and planned with him to escape. It was many years before an opportunity presented itself and the boy had grown to manhood; but on a dark, rainy night, when the overseer was too sick to look after the placing of the guards, they crept from their

cabin and fled through the forest. In three days' time they were captured and taken back and were then conducted into an open court, where the other slaves might look on, and flogged unmercifully. For the first time since he had been sold in Charleston, Ni-jim cursed the white race, raving and tugging at his chains in an agony of despair. Sometimes he dropped on his knees and, with folded hands and face turned upward, he called plaintively: "Massa Bill O-o-o-h, Massa Bill!"

That was the nearest that the negro ever came to a prayer, but it showed the depths of sorrow to which he had sunk. Faith was gone and hope was gone, but still there abode in his heart the love for the man who, finding him a seemingly unconquerable brute, had looked into his face with kindly eyes and had led him away like a little child. Of a God he knew but little, and cared less; no personal conceit had shaped for him a theory of the immortality of the soul, and there were no outer lights to guide him. A commission had been intrusted to him and he had failed through no fault of his own. And yet he blamed himself. He had trusted when bitter experience should have taught him not to trust. The cry broke from his lips in an agony of feeling that somewhere, somehow, his master might know and understand. For some days he tried to starve himself, but at last seemed to relent and, when his wounds had healed, he went about his accustomed work in silence, scarcely ever breaking it even to speak to his son.

One day he gave Jim the letter inclosed in the leathern belt and told him to preserve it carefully,

and, if an opportunity should ever present itself, to take it to Boston and deliver it.

One night Ni-jim spied upon his master, the Ven-  
ezuelan, and, slipping out through the darkness, he  
caught the man by the throat and killed him. In a  
few minutes he returned and, after stealing a couple  
of horses, he and his son fled together. Once more  
they were pursued and at last they were found.  
Ni-jim refused to surrender and attacked his pursuers  
with a large club. He was shot down, loaded with  
chains and died a raving maniac.

This was the story as Red Shirt told it and, when  
he had concluded, he began to walk up and down  
the little ledge in a very frenzy of rage.

"Look! Look!" he cried, tearing open his shirt and  
exhibiting to them the rough scar of a burn upon his  
breast,—the letter L branded on his flesh with a hot  
iron.

Up and down he strode with clenched fists, his  
whole body quivering with suppressed fury. A little  
bush grew on the ledge and he tore it up by the  
roots with his powerful arms and hurled it below him  
and continued to rage up and down.

"In Spanish dat stand fer *Ladrone*," he cried. "Dat  
mean highway robber; dat mean t'ief; dat mean stink-  
in', yaller dawg, dat whut he mean. An' me got dat  
damn business burn on de hide tel I die an' go ter  
hell!"

He dropped down on his knees and beat his fists  
against the ground, ripping out broken oaths that  
were fearful and wonderful in their make-up. Sud-  
denly he rose to his feet with a harsh laugh.



"But I done fix um," he cried. "Oh, by Gar, I got de revenge! A-a-h, I got de ten time revenge."

"What was the revenge, the rest of the story?" asked Aaron Green. Red Shirt continued to walk up and down in silence, a strange light in his eyes and a cruel smile on his face.

"Dom Pedro, de Brazil emp'ror, bimeby he free de nigger," he said. "Den I go ter de coas' an' wu'k at de sailor business an' bimeby I meet wid De Quina, an' us be de putty good frien'. He been be de colonel in Hayti, an' de big man wid de mountain robber in Cuba, an' he been er-fightin' all roun'. Ni-jim, he tell me 'bout de gol' money, an' I come back ter git dat money, but I cain' fin' de stuff. I been learn read de English, but de letter he de damn fool letter, an' Misser Traylor he de man mus' read de letter. I wu'k at de Traylor planashun an' try ter study out de letter, an' when dat dawg Eph, my gran'daddy, run me 'way, I go fin' De Quina an' den me an' him fix up scheme. Dey is mo' dan eight million nigger in dis country an' De Quina he say dat mek mighty nice rebolushun. Den, by Gar, de scheme he be dat I be de king an' he be de gen'l, an' den we 'range dat you be hep' wid de Gov'mint. De Quina he been see de nigger run Gov'mint an' he say de nigger damn fool evvy time. He say dat de bullet and de cannon been be de only way run de nigger business an', by Gar, he right! I be de king an' den I show you. One town, he be raise hell, an' den I say ter de gen'l dat he tek de army an' kill dat damn town an' den it be no more hell raise in dat town, by Gar!"

"What about the revenge?" asked the preacher.

"You haven't told me about that. You haven't even told it to De Quina."

"Dat be putty fur way an' dat be my damn business," said Red Shirt, with wrinkled brows.

"Oh, well," said Aaron Green, shrugging his shoulders, "you needn't tell us if you don't want to. You needn't be afraid of us though, you know. Everything you tell us is all right." Red Shirt's eyes blazed.

"No," he cried, "I not be 'fraid you. By Gar, you too damn deep in! You gib de slip one time an', by Gar, you lie in de gum swamp an' de buzzar' he git putty fat."

"Aw, here!" said De Quina. "Be de good frien'. He no' care yo' revanche. You needa no be 'fraid ter tell."

"'Fraid ter tell!" exclaimed Red Shirt hotly. "No, I not 'fraid damn t'ing. I tell de revenge, by Gar, an' den you not lak, I cut de damn t'roat you bofe."

After some time they succeeded in pacifying him, but he now insisted, out of pure bravado, in telling the rest of his story.

"Atter Dom Pedro been free de nigger," he said, "I come ter coas' an' den I been t'ink dat I mus' hab de revenge. De Venezuile whut Ni-jim done kill, he hab de putty daughter. She got de fine, black eye an' de long shiny black hair, an' she been sing all de time. She been 'bout sebenteen an', by Gar, she got de putty face, an' she been play lak hell wid de guitar. Atter de Venezuile been kill she been lib wid her fader, he sister, but I been fin' dat out an' been go hide an' wait. Den one time, she tek

de li'l pony an' go ride wid de ol' woman." He stopped at the thought and laughed loudly. "Dat ol' woman she been holler lak hell," he said, with a chuckle. "I got de good stick an' hit de ol' woman *kervip* an' *kervop*, an' den she be putty still an' not holler no mo'."

The others sat watching him, fascinated by the tale. The preacher swallowed nervously once or twice and then cleared his throat. It was very dry. Stories such as this were, since his fall, as sweet morsels to his soul; but, truth to tell, except for an outward bravado brought about through the Indian blood in his veins, Aaron Green was an utter coward.

"Dat putty young lady, she go wid me tek de li'l ride," continued Red Shirt with gusto. "Tek nice li'l ride, but she been skeer so bad she go sleep wid faint, an' I hol' her disser way in mer arm on de hawse, an' us been go putty fas'. An' den bimeby she wake up an' she not be too frien'ly. No, by Gar, she been squeal an' mek putty big fuss ter be so li'l an' so putty. Bimeby us fin' de nice li'l cabin somebody done lef an' it be de big lot banan' tree wid de fin' banan' an' de li'l gal she not want eat. She been cry all de time. She been eat at her arm an' try ter die, but I tie de arm, by Gar, an' she not can die."

He laughed roughly and, rolling up his sleeve, exhibited a scar.

"She be de li'l hell-cat," he explained, "an' I get putty tired damn lot foolishness an' den I been tie her down good an' den mek de whoof an' all be done, an' den I come back ter coas' an' be de sailor."

The preacher was shaking violently and his face

was ashy. He pulled himself together as best he could.

"What do you mean by *whoof*?" he asked with dry lips.

"Doan' you know whut dat mean?" queried Red Shirt in disgust. "Dat mean cut de t'roat an' burn de house down, by Gar; dat whut he mean! De gen'l, he know," he continued, pointing at De Quina with a jerk of his thumb. De Quina laughed softly.

"Certaine, certaine," he said. "*Whoof*, dat say plain: 'Burn da house.'"

A strange giddiness seized the preacher. He broke a little twig from a bush growing at his side and chewed it to conceal his emotion. The act did not escape Red Shirt's eye. He drew a new revolver of heavy caliber from his pocket and exhibited it meaningly.

"See dat?" he asked quietly.

Aaron Green turned his gaze upon it and then looked at Red Shirt with an uncertain eye.

"Dat say," exclaimed Red Shirt, "dat de frawg gizzard in de nigger not bery good t'ing when de nigger know too damn much."

"Oh, I am all right," said the preacher. "I was just thinking."

"Dat say, too," replied Red Shirt, tapping the weapon meaningly, "dat say it bes' t'ing ter do lak de house *whoof*."

"I have already forgotten it," said the preacher. "I am not afraid of your pistol. I was thinking about the time I—was—hanged."

The others laughed gleefully.

"Dat how come you so long," chuckled Red Shirt. "Mebbe so you done mek de *whoof*."

The preacher shuddered and was silent. His head was bowed and he drew little figures on the ground with a stick. The others waited for the story they knew would come. The psychological moment for confessions was at hand. At last the preacher raised his head and began to speak.

"I met her in Connecticut," he said. "My mother had owned some swamp-land near New Orleans. The city needed it and bought it for a good big sum and filled it in. My mother died and gave me the money, and I went north to school, and a Yankee took care of my money and sent it to me. I studied for the ministry and got through, and then I met her in Connecticut. There I went with her openly everywhere. I loved her honestly and I told her so, but my money was gone and we had to wait to marry, for she had nothing." He closed his eyes and the lids fluttered strangely. "She was white," he said. "She had beautiful blue eyes and her hair was golden in color. She went to Texas to teach school and, after I had got a good place, I thought to surprise her and went there to marry her. One afternoon late we went to the court-house to get a marriage license, and when she stood beside me and I asked for it, the clerk stared at me and staggered as though I had struck him a blow in the face. Then he knocked me down with an inkstand and sprang clear over the counter toward me. I had a knife and I cut him with it several times, and then a crowd rushed in." He put his hands before his face and bowed his head.

"The women took her and whipped her and then tarred and feathered her. The men led me away with a rope around my neck and did awful things to me. Then they threw me in a wagon and carried me out of town and hanged me to a post-oak, after having whipped me with rawhides. One of them shot me as they rode away. After they were gone an Englishman came and cut me down and took care of me until I could get away, and the people of that county want me to-day on a murder charge. The clerk died."

The men were silent for some moments, and then Red Shirt looked up.

"What go wid dat yaller-hair woman?" he asked.

Aaron Green did not raise his head.

"God only knows," he said.

"I t'ink, by Gar, dat putty damn bad business man cain' tek up wid white woman," said Red Shirt. He scrambled to his feet. "Wait till de rebolushun hit git all right, an' den we kill de damn white man an' tek all de putty white gals, an' den dey be no mo' kick up no mo'."

De Quina rose to his feet and Aaron Green did the same.

"I tek me 'bout ten,—all got de blue eye an' de gol' hair," said De Quina, as they trudged along. Red Shirt laughed loudly, but Aaron Green stalked along behind; his face was set and ashy and his thoughts were far away.

## CHAPTER XXII

SLIM SIMPSON

Things had not been going on well at the mill. The negroes, though outwardly as polite and almost as hard-working as before, had quit their happy songs and rhythmical chants as they labored together, and a sullen silence lay over them. Glances full of meaning passed between them, and when one of their number was upbraided for some fault in his work or even for lack of industry, he never attempted to explain, nor did he offer to do better. There was only a stare, a sneer and a shrug of the shoulders.

Millions upon millions of feet of lumber lay in the dry-houses. It had been accumulated by the company, to be held against the day when railroad facilities would make the moving of it easy. The directors knew that when this day arrived they would be able to undersell any other milling concern in the country and still make an enormous profit. Martin had been talking the matter over with Mr. Oliver.

"We need more guards," he said. "If some skulking negro should put fire to one of the dry-houses and the others should refuse to handle the lines of hose from the water-tanks, the whole plant would be destroyed without one dollar's worth of insurance."

Mr. Oliver puffed thoughtfully at his cigar and his forehead puckered with vexation.

"I have put the matter before the directors," he replied. "You know as well as I do that they all, including your father, believe in the negro and have no fear of such a thing. For several years past they have been putting every dollar they could rake and scrape into more timber land. It's land, land, land all the time, and I don't blame them. We have been getting it for a song, and when the road is built it will be better than a gold mine. I have been in favor of all that, because I know what it means. The six thousand acres of pine land that we bought last week for seventy-five cents an acre will be worth fifty thousand dollars in two weeks after the road gets in here. That is all well and good, but there are other things. I am expected to cut enough heavy timber and float it to Pensacola to pay for the running of this mill and for the cutting of all the lumber we are piling up here, and they will not stand any additional outlay of money, except for land, until the road is built. We have floated the bonds we needed and the road will be building in a very short time now, and will be put through just as fast as men and machinery can make it go. You see the letters I get, directing me to cut expenses wherever I can without reducing the working force or curtailing the output. It's pinch here and scrape there and squeeze somewhere else, and I am getting sick and tired of it. You know well enough that I can't cut the wages and keep the negroes out here in the woods. They are sullen and mean enough already, and would just



about burn the plant and go away if I attempted it. The other day I had to hire a trifling negro who picks the banjo, just to have him round here to play for them when they want to have dances. They are growing dissatisfied, for some cause, and I don't want a strike on my hands."

Martin was silent a minute and then walked over and drummed with his fingers on the window-pane.

"Well," he said at last, "it's your job and not mine, but, if you want me to do so, I will write to father about it."

"Write father nothing!" replied Mr. Oliver hotly. "If I, as president of the company, haven't influence enough to get things done without having the son of one of the directors write to his father and plead for me, why, I'll throw up the job, sell out my stock and quit." Martin laughed.

"So-o-ho!" he exclaimed. "I see you are getting tired of it, too! You thought that it was funny when I got blue."

"Oh, go on out and let me alone," replied Mr. Oliver. "Go and get your mare and take a ride. Go to town; go to see some girl, or go to thunder, just as you choose! I have troubles enough already without having you come and sit around every day when you finish your work and augment them by rehearsing the list." Martin laughed again and started from the room.

"I believe I will take a ride," he said. "I don't care to go to Granville, however. I am sick of the sight of the place."

"Go over to Slim Simpson's and cuss him out, then.

He needs it, for he has been selling whisky to the negroes again. A lot of them got full last night. I promised to have the matter reported to the federal officers at Mobile, but I am afraid to do even that."

"Why?"

"Because, if the negroes can't get whisky, they will raise sand and go somewhere else where they can get it. Go and cuss Slim out and make him regulate his traffic. I find that it is just as you said. He sells through that negro, Gid Amos, in Granville, and he brings it here. We can't prove it on Gid, but if they will make it a rule not to sell any one negro more than half a pint of the stuff, or even a pint at a time, why, then, it's none of my business to hunt up the revenue officers. I am not covering up Slim's sins nor agreeing for him to do it, mind you, but in that event it is simply none of my business, and the officers can do their own searching."

Martin left the offices and got Ase to saddle Alabama.

"Ase, I am going to break up Slim Simpson's whisky business," he said, as he swung himself into the saddle. Ase's eyes started and he grew almost ashy.

"Cap'n," he cried hurriedly, "yer know dat I got drunk when Vi'let done me so mean, an' den I made de 'feshun 'bout dat man, but fer Gawd's sake I wouldn' mix wid it ef I wuz you. I done it 'kase I doan' rickolleck whut I done dat night, but I had er sneakin' notion dat dat man done pump me 'bout er heap er business whut liable ter git me in trubble wid de niggers, I tol' yer dat ter git eben wid dat

man, an', fer Gawd's sake, doan' say nothin' ter him 'bout liquor!"

"Why not?" asked Martin. Ase was silent for a moment.

"I'm yer frien', Cap'n," he said in a husky voice, "an' you's too nice er man fer ter mix wid de liquor business."

"You are crazy!" said Martin. "I have got nothing to do with the liquor business. You told me about it when you were nearly dead after that drunk you got on, and I don't intend to tell Slim Simpson or anybody else where I got the information. Even the president doesn't know. He spoke to Slim about it, but Slim has no idea how we found it out." Ase caught his stirrup and clung to it.

"Cap'n, hit ain't no use fer ter see dat man," he cried.

"Why not?"

"'Kase—'kase he ain't got no liquor business no mo'."

"Aw! Stuff and rubbish! Why do you want to lie to me? Didn't a lot of negroes get drunk on his whisky last night, and one of them cut another?" Ase held up his right hand.

"Cap'n," he said earnestly, "I hope ter Gawd I may die bit by er million rattlesnakes ef dat ain't so, but de good Gawd he'p me ef yer lets out de news!"

Martin turned from him in disgust. The negro's action was to him inexplicable. He clucked to Alabama and rode swiftly away, almost throwing Ase flat in the road. Once he looked back and saw the

negro standing watching him. Ase stretched out his arms appealingly, and when Martin turned his head and continued to ride on he sat down on the horse-block to think matters over. At last he crossed one leg over the other, sighed deeply and spit at a wandering ant that was struggling along through the heavy sand at his feet.

"I des 'clares ter goodness, hit des look lak dey ain't nobody got no sense," he muttered. "Here I sets lak er fool bewhilst dat white man he ridin' off lak er fool. De black fool he do de fus' tellin', an' de white fool he do de nex' tellin', an' den evvybody gits inter trubble." He rose and walked slowly into the barn.

"Shucks!" he exclaimed. "I is done foolin' wid dat man. I goes wid de balance. I spec dat s'iety am er hell uv er business, but I jines ter-night. 'Tain't no use fer ter turn 'gin yer color nohow. All yer gits in de en' am er-cussin' f'um de white man an' er t'roat-cuttin' f'um de nigger. De cap'n an' me is done out an' done wid." Here he shied a nubbin of corn at a fleeing rat. "Yassuh, us is done busted up us's frawg-house an' he kin th'ow de crap dices erway, 'kase me an him ain't gwineter shoot no mo'."

Down at the turn of the road Martin whirled Alabama toward the east and left the Granville bridge behind him. At last he drew rein as he spied Slim Simpson sitting on a log beside the road. Slim's hound rose with a growl and slunk behind his master.

"You are the very man I wanted to see," said Martin, as he pulled up his mare. "We have been talking it over at the mill, and you have simply got to quit selling whisky to the negroes. They get as

drunk as cooters on that pine-top you make and are liable to burn down the mill property. If I hear of your doing it again, I shall report it at Mobile and have you sent to the penitentiary."

Slim Simpson eyed Martin coldly for a moment.

"In de fus' place," he replied, "I ain't er-mekin' no liquor, an' I ain't er-sellin' no liquor, an' de people at Mobile can't tetch me. Crack yer whip, Major, an' let her roll."

"There is no use in lying about it," exclaimed Martin angrily. "I simply intend to warn you this time. We don't object to the negroes having a little whisky now and then, but we don't propose to have you sell it to them by the gallon, and if we catch you at it we'll see that it is stopped."

Slim drew a knife from his pocket, cut off a piece of chewing tobacco, stuffed it into his mouth and closed the knife with a click.

"Glad yer happened erlong," he said slowly. "I wuz des er-settin' here studyin' erbout gwine ter de mill ter see you anyhow. 'Twuz er leedle late an' so I 'lowed dat maybe hit mout be bes' ter wait tel ter-morrer."

"What did you want to see me about?"

Slim turned the chew of tobacco slowly in his mouth to moisten it.

"Mr. Wentworth," he said, "I needs er thousan' dollars an' I needs it bad. I 'lowed I mout mek de 'rangemints wid you."

Martin stared at the man for a moment in utter amazement and then, slapping his thigh, laughed loudly. The idea was truly ridiculous.

"What on earth have you got that I want that is worth a thousand dollars?" he asked at last. Slim rose and gazed full into Martin's eyes.

"You think I am a fool," he said, as he drew his shoulders straight and the look of slouchiness passed from him. "Perhaps I am," he continued, without waiting for a reply. "In fact, I know I am, but whatever my mental condition may be, and notwithstanding the many foolish things I have done in my life, I still have something that is worth not only a thousand, but even ten thousand, and possibly a hundred thousand dollars to you."

Martin was surprised, both at the man's change of manner and his mode of speech. He sneered at Slim's reply.

"A flying machine, no doubt," he retorted. "I think you are crazy. You ought to be sent to Tuscaloosa."

"Possibly so," replied Slim, "but I need the money and every time you abuse me, why, I raise my price."

Martin whirled his mare with a snort of disgust.

"Why, I ought to cowhide you," he cried. "You mean to threaten me, I suppose."

The man sprang out into the road and seized Alabama by the bit.

"Mr. Wentworth," he called loudly, "wait a moment and hear me. It may mean your death if you do not. What I have to tell is worth the money."

"Take your hand off of that bridle," cried Martin hotly. Slim's hand fell to his side and the mare was free.

"Listen!" he called. "If you swear not to breathe a word of it I will tell you now, and if it isn't worth

a thousand dollars, then don't pay me one cent. I leave the whole thing to you as an honest man, but I want the money in a very few hours from now if I do tell you. I want the cash."

Martin touched Alabama and rode slowly away, Slim following at his side.

"If you don't get away I will cut you with this riding-whip," cried Martin.

"For God's sake, listen to me!" pleaded the man. "I need the money and you need what I have to tell you. Listen to me!"

Long afterward Martin remembered the quivering, pleading face and the outstretched hands of the moonshiner. "What a fool I was!" he cried many and many a time in the days that were to come; but now he waved the man aside and rode on.

"Remember about that whisky and take warning," he called.

"Remember what I offered to do," shouted Slim in return.

He watched Martin gallop round a turn in the road. There was a switch of the mare's tail and they were lost to view. He stretched his hands after them. "Remember, remember, remember!" he cried brokenly, and then he threw himself down in the dead leaves by the roadside with a sobbing cry. All the sorrows of the many years came crowding on him thick and fast, and the foreboding of the woes of future days gathered around him like a pall.

"Oh, Lord!" he moaned in an agony of heart. "Dear, dear Lord, please turn Thy face to me. I beg and pray, for my good mother's sake; for the

sake of Jesus of Nazareth, Thine only son. Oh, Lord, be merciful! Be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Long he lay by the roadside, raving and praying, but at last he rose to his knees and gazed sadly at his dog, which had lain watching him.

"Slink, it's no use," he cried. "We'll wait a little while, but I believe it's no use to try any more."

The hound rose and, walking over, licked his master's hand and gazed up with yellow, tremulous eyes.

"You are the best dog in the world, Slink, even if you are a coward," muttered Simpson, as he patted the animal's ugly head.

"Find me the trail," he sobbed. "Find it for me, Slink, you who can follow anything, oh find me the way back to redemption and into the heart of God! I wanted to be good in those days, Slink. God Himself knows I did. I was insane for just an hour, just a single hour, but I was haunted by Wilson Hartley and I couldn't help it, I couldn't help it!" Here he caught the beast's head between his hands. "Yes, I was insane, Slink, and, oh, how I have prayed! how I have groveled and crawled before the Lord, crying: 'See, my soul is Thine to do with as Thou wilt, and my body lies belly downward in the dust.' I have so wanted it all for Josh's sake, Slink, for he is going the road to hell, and he doesn't care. I have wanted the money to take him away from here, for I can't blame him, Slink. I wanted to give him an education and start him out in life. To put him somewhere where the shame of his father would not be upon him and the lowly birth of his mother would not follow him to curse him."



The man rose and, picking up his hat, started toward his home through the evening shadows, the tears streaming down his weather-beaten cheeks. Once he turned and caught the hound's head roughly between his hands. "I think I am going insane, Slink," he hissed. "I have been trying to keep it off for twenty years, but it has been piling up and piling up, and I think that—it—will—come—soon." He gave the animal a shake and it yelped with pain and fear and broke from his grasp. He raised his face toward the sky.

"Dear, dear Lord, help me," he murmured brokenly. "Oh, merciful Father, help me to help my boy!"

From somewhere off in the swamp there came the solemn mournful hoot of an owl. The sound threaded through the words of his prayer as they fell from his lips, like a mockery, a call of never, never more. He halted and listened. Again it came, but this time it seemed nearer. He bowed his head and walked slowly onward, while Slink followed behind, his eyes fixed on his master's back and a dull wonder in his brute brain as to what was the cause of it all. At last Slim neared his gate, and there he saw Josh sitting asleep in a fence corner, a whisky flask between his feet. The father stood gazing at him for some moments. Josh had drunk himself into insensibility.

Slowly Slim raised his hands toward the heavens and they fell again heavily at his side. His lips quivered and the tears gushed from his eyes. In his ears strange noises beat and roared, but through it all there came to him again the melancholy hoot of the owl.

He walked slowly to the house and there secured a pillow and a blanket and filled a flask with water. Returning, he covered the boy, placing the pillow under his head and the bottle beside him. A huge dog had, at his command, followed him from the house, and Slim now looked into the great beast's eyes.

"Watch!" he commanded.

The dog gazed at his master for a moment and then, lying down, blinked his eyes slowly. Settling himself comfortably, he rested his dewlap on his paws and began his dreary watch. He had performed this service before and knew just what his duties were,—simply to protect the boy from danger and to follow him should he awake and wander away.

Slim had on many occasions remonstrated with his son for drinking so hard, and had even, under the bond of father and son, related to him the bitter story of his own life.

The blood of the moonshiner's daughter was in the boy's veins. The softer qualities inherited from his father were overcome by the rough good-heartedness and devil-may-care recklessness that had characterized his mother all the days of her life.

When Jared Ogletree had taken Mary Simpson by the hand in the old days and had led her from her piney-woods home, they had been married by a magistrate in a little country town.

"Whut's yo' name, anyhow, honey?" she had asked, as they walked along the road toward the magistrate's house. He halted suddenly and gazed at her with startled eyes.

"I have no name," he said hoarsely. "Go back,

Mary! It will be best for you if you leave me." The tears gathered in her eyes and her full, red lips quivered.

"I wouldn't do it," she replied, with a sob, "ef yer had kilt, or stole, er done wusser. Honey, I'm me, des me, an' nobody seppen me. De ain't no angels an' nobody kin pull me 'way seppen yer meks me go. Ef yer is done de wronges' thing in de worl', hit doan' mek no diffunt. I'll he'p yer start over, an' us kin wash hit out an' fergit it. Call yerse'f Simpson ef yer wants ter. Hit's my name an' I gives yer half. Hit'll be our'n tergedder." The tears streamed down her cheeks. "Oh, whut is I done ter yer? Whut is I done ter yer?" she sobbed. Her eyes grew desperate. "Ef yer doan' want no squire, I doan' keer," she cried. "I'll be yer dog tel I dies. Oh, I wisht yer had er shot me in de swamp, ef yer gwineter quit me!"

Tears came into his eyes and he took her in his arms and kissed her and comforted her. Then he took her name and, so far as the world was concerned, he turned his back upon it and all that it contained—all that he had known and loved.

Then the days came when it grew hard for him, though many things his wife said and did jarred upon him fearfully, yet because of his affection for her and her great, unselfish love for him, he had passed them over in silence. Sometimes, to keep from going utterly mad, he would take paper and pencil and write for hours at a time, rapidly and feverishly. The old, old self stirred in him and his soul was filled with the bitterness of gall. He tried to escape from it, but, like the Frankenstein monster, it fol-

lowed him always, and day by day it stole from him the beauties of life. The old ambition hungered and the caged intellect turned and turned again upon its track like a beautiful tiger that rages for freedom and will not cease its eternal quest for a broken bar. Then it was that, stirred to desperation, he would feed the ambition with an empty dream, and his soul would wander with the tiger midst the happy fields and forests that naught but death can cheat us of. He would write, write until a light shone in his face, and the phantom of a hope that had naught to do with this world would tint his thoughts to a beauty that drew him from himself, and he forgot.

At such times Mary would sit apart and watch him, her eyes filled with wonder and a strange awe of him holding her heart so that it was reflected in her face. Then, when the spell had passed, he would burn what he had written and she would come to him timidly and humbly, speaking to him gently and lovingly, lest he should fly away again to that other world that she knew naught of, but which she feared because she could not understand.

Slowly he slipped down the ladder; outwardly at first, to avoid the contrast between the two, for he knew almost from the beginning that she could never rise; then inwardly, because he felt that the old self within him was dying. The tiger was growing old and now stood and sadly stared out between the bars with an almost forgotten dream of lands and days now long since lost.

He fell into her manner of speech and, when the question of the method of livelihood presented itself,

Mary suggested the one with which she was most familiar. He considered it for some time and then adopted it and, after a while, he prospered in a small way.

On two or three occasions, he had gone to Montgomery and from there had, under an assumed name, sent money to Macon to persons to whom he owed debts. No explanation was given and no letter was written. He had also sent money to apply on the amount he had stolen on the fatal and, to him, ever-remembered night, when T. Washington Burns was left gasping in the dark on the floor of the little room wherein the light of Jared Ogletree's life and hopes had gone out.

With both Simpson and his wife, the payment of these matters had been a constant aim throughout the years, and it was nearly three years after her death before he was able to make the last payment. Then it was that he returned to his little place near Granville, a man who owed no debt in the world save one, that to the hangman,—a debt which he meant never to pay.

Then it was, with his mind and heart relieved of his burdens, that he turned his attention to his son, but it was already too late. Perhaps the end would have been the same had this not been the case. The boy had grown to be almost a man and was beyond his father's influence. He had always possessed a remarkably quick and active mind. At school he learned with ease and yet seemed to care but little for the learning he acquired, being without ambition or appreciation of the value of knowledge and education.

So it came to pass that Josh Simpson, good-hearted and generous to a fault, had been molded, except as to mental capacity, after his mother's people. Sometimes he struggled to take up the other part that lay in him and to cultivate it, but he soon fell back into the old ruts and gave up the struggle.

"I am my mother's son," he said one day to his father. "I am the grandson of Ike Simpson, the illicit distiller, the son of Slim Simpson, the illicit distiller. I blame no one; I am satisfied, and to what shall I rise when I am satisfied?"

There had, however, been days when something fought within him; when he had wandered in the wood in a vague unrest, as his father had done when he first came to Granville. The two natures in his being struggled for the mastery. And the softer nature always fell.

In his later years, he had not wandered in the wood, but had drunk himself to insensibility and, though he knew he was breaking his father's heart, yet he did not seem to care.

"Fall to my measure, dad," he would say. "I am satisfied and there is nothing in this world for you."

And now, when night had fallen, Slim Simpson sat on his doorstep and gazed at the ground, but he prayed no more. Beyond the rail fence that marked the outward limits of his property, lay his only son. At last he rose and, going to his room, dropped face downward on his bed. His eyes were tearless and dry, but he lay watching out the night, with a heart that was heavy as stone.

Early in the morning, Josh came down the path-

way, dry-faced and haggard ; the dog that had watched him all night long followed as far as the doorstep, where it lay down and waited to be discharged from its duties. Josh took a drink of whisky and went into a room where he stretched himself upon a bed to fight the battle out in silence.

Slim rose and walked quietly out toward the garden where Mary Simpson slept in a grass-covered grave under an apple-tree. He gazed for a moment at the mound, his face quivering with suppressed grief, and then he fell beside it with a bitter cry.

“Oh, Absalom, my son Absalom!” he moaned.  
“Would to God I might die for thee!”

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE LETTER L

One evening when the society met, there was unusual business to be transacted. None but the leaders knew what was to be done, and the preacher had carefully trained them day after day, that they might know their respective parts in the program. He had written out the responses they were to make during the course of the ceremony, and they had studied them industriously and had at last learned them. Red Shirt, De Quina and the preacher each felt that the time for action was rapidly approaching, and they feared further delay. They knew that unrest and discontent was general among the negroes in the black belt toward the north, and they felt that when once the spark was lighted, the conflagration would be widespread and rapid. It needed but the first show of success and there would be no lack of following throughout the whole South.

Nearly every mill-hand had joined the society, and each had been assessed one dollar a week that more money might be raised for the purchase of equipment and supplies.

"Those negroes want action," Aaron Green had said some days before. "They won't hold out much longer,



unless they know something about what we are going to do. The occasion is ripe now and we can work them up to the point where there will be no doubt about their unqualified acceptance of our plans."

"You show me de nigger whut wabble," Red Shirt had replied. "You show me dat man, an' me an' him go tek nice li'l walk pick flowers, by Gar, an' den he go tek li'l trip see his gran'daddy. Dey hab swo' an' dey mus' stick."

The members of the society were bound to secrecy and obedience by strange and wonderful oaths and, during the ceremony of initiation, a small wound had been made in the breast of each candidate just over the heart, and a drop of blood was drawn. This had been allowed to fall into an L-shaped receptacle made of tin, which was carried suspended from Red Shirt's neck. This was called "The Mingling of the Blood." At the beginning, the ceremonies, outside of simple oaths of secrecy, had been, for the greater part, nothing but horse-play of the roughest character; but there arose suddenly within the society a secret organization, with which the others had nothing to do and of which they understood nothing. Its members became grave and thoughtful and their very silence and care in guarding the approaches to the building during the sessions attracted the inquisitiveness of the entire membership of the older organization and, upon application, they were admitted one by one. The new order was called "The Brotherhood of the Letter L," and the avowed penalty for an exposure of its secrets and mysteries was death.

The sign of the new order was given by raising the

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right arm straight upward from the shoulder with the open fingers pointing toward the heavens, the left arm being extended toward the left on a line with the shoulder, the whole forming the letter L.

The password of the order was Leopard and was given in the following manner :

The officers challenging approached the one to be challenged with the salutation—

“Hello, Pard !”

To this the other made reply :

“Hello, Leop !”

The one challenging repeated the word, thus :

“Leop !”

The response to this was the word :

“Pard !”

The challenger, being satisfied with the responses up to this point, would take the other by the hand and say :

“Our blood—”

To which reply would be made :

“—has been mingled.”

When a member desired to attend a meeting, he was required, in addition to the above, to whisper into the ear of the sentinel what was called “The Password of the Sign.” This was given by every one, whether he was present at the opening of the lodge, or came after the ceremonies had begun, the call being :

“What sign, my brother ?”

The response being :

“The Letter L.”

The Password of the Sign was all that was required to be given by those who were present when the lodge

of the Brotherhood was called to order, it being whispered in the ear of the interlocutor.

At about eight o'clock on the night selected for the special ceremonies, the members began to file in. At the bridge across Willow Creek two sentinels were posted with repeating rifles and, as each negro crossed, he was challenged. He paused and, approaching one of the challengers, while the other stood with his rifle ready for firing, whispered a few words and was allowed to pass on. At the door of the building, he was subjected to the same challenge and, giving the same responses, passed in and mingled with the others who had preceded him.

Benches had been placed against the sides of the building, thus leaving an open space in the center, and soon all the members had arrived and taken their seats. In a few moments De Quina descended from the loft, dressed in a gorgeous uniform and wearing a feathered chapeau. It was a dress uniform he had worn as a colonel in Hayti until political changes had forced him to flee the island. Its gold lace and striking colors at once attracted the attention and admiration of every negro in the building.

"Jesis Marster! Don't he shine!" exclaimed a member of the order in audible tones.

At De Quina's side dangled a sword and in his hand he carried a banner of buff-colored goods spotted with black, and upon it, worked in red, was the inevitable letter L. This banner he planted near the north end of the building.

After De Quina came three heavy black negroes, each wearing a sash of the same color and markings

as the banner. They were three of the most intelligent negroes in the employ of the company and earned higher wages than the majority of the others. Aaron Green had selected them to fill offices in the organization, because each had had some educational advantages and was able to learn and understand the parts in the ceremonies allotted to him and could recite them with clearness. Jack Meadows took his seat in a high chair at the southern end of the building on a little platform that had been placed at that point. Dick Johnson and Nelson Riley took other seats, Dick on the west side and Nelson on the east.

De Quina then went about the hall distributing to the members small pieces of cardboard cut to form the letter L, each being covered with the same spotted cloth. These they fastened on their coats in silence, while De Quina returned to the foot of the stairs and, mounting them slowly, disappeared in the loft above. A little buzz of expectancy made the round of the hall and then a silence fell on the assembly.

Slowly footsteps approached the head of the stairs and De Quina and Aaron Green were seen descending with a most wonderful personage between them. De Quina was holding his drawn sword in his right hand and Aaron Green was dressed in a robe of black and carried a small Bible. Slowly and majestically they descended with the strange personage still between them. When they reached the foot of the stairs, the preacher and the soldier fell behind and the three proceeded toward the north end of the building while a chorus of *oh's* and *ah's* rose about them.

The personage whom they conducted with so much

pomp and ceremony was none other than Red Shirt, but nothing of his former dress now remained to identify him. He was clad in a long, flowing robe of the spotted material, while a peculiarly shaped, white-furred skin hung from his shoulders. Upon his head was a crown of tin, gilded until it shone with great splendor under the play of light from the numerous lanterns hung about the hall. From Red Shirt's breast there was suspended an enormous representation of the letter L, but, unlike those worn by the other members of the Brotherhood, it was covered with white fur. In his right hand he carried a gilded mace that looked like the clapper from some church-bell.

Slowly Red Shirt was conducted to his seat, and then Aaron Green seated himself at the king's right and De Quina at his left.

Two young negroes now came and stood before the throne with bowed heads. Red Shirt waved his hand majestically toward them and they bowed still lower.

“Freshmints,” he said.

The two crossed the room, mounted the stairs and soon returned with a jug of whisky, a bucket of water and two glasses. Red Shirt took a drink, after which he raised his arm with the intention of wiping his mouth on the sleeve of his robe, but Aaron Green kicked his foot and he did not do so. He glared at the preacher for a moment, then licked his lips and shrugged his shoulders. The officers were served in turn and then the whisky was passed around among the members. When each had taken a drink, what remained in the two-gallon jug was returned to the

loft, Red Shirt's glittering eyes following the two negroes yearningly. At last there was quiet throughout the room and Aaron Green slowly rose to his feet and, pointing across to Jack Meadows, asked in a deep voice:

"Why sit you so silent, O Prince of Kaffraria?"

Meadows rose to his feet.

"O Prince of Barbary," he replied, "my heart is heavy, my head is bowed with sorrow and the burden of my woes is greater than I can bear."

"Whence thy grief and why the multitude of thy tears, O Prince of Kaffraria?" asked the preacher.

"Because, O Prince of Barbary, my country is overrun and laid waste; my people have been taken in captivity and sold into bondage. The Lord has laid a curse on me and my people, therefore, my heart is very heavy and mine eyes are filled with tears."

"Lift up thy voice to the Lord, O Prince of Kaffraria, that He may incline His ear to the telling of thy sorrows."

"O Prince of Barbary," replied Meadows in a sepulchral tone, "the Lord has hardened His heart against me and my people; the gates of mercy are closed against them, and the sweat of bondage shall be their portion until they shall utterly pass away and be destroyed."

A deep groan ran through the crowd and all, including Red Shirt, bowed their heads, following the example of Aaron Green.

Again the preacher spoke, directing his speech to Dick Johnson, who stood with bowed head on the western side of the hall.

"O Prince of Senegambia," he called, "why is thy head bowed down and why is thy heart sorrowful?"

Dick looked up with a long, mournful face.

"O Prince of Barbary," he replied, "the Lord has utterly forgotten me and my people. His curse is upon me and my heart is as dust and ashes."

"Be of good cheer, O Prince of Senegambia," cried the preacher. "Lift up thy voice unto the Lord and He will incline His ear to the telling of thy despair."

"O Prince of Barbary," was the response, "the Lord has made of my land a land of desolation and He has cursed my people with an everlasting curse."

Again there were loud groans through the assembly. A high-keyed cry of "Oh, Lawd," from some heart-wrung negro, rose from a far corner and made the others quiver with the intensity of feeling that pervaded its tones.

Once more the preacher lifted his head and turned his eyes toward Nelson Riley, whose seat was on the eastern side of the hall.

"O Prince of Somali," he cried, "and hast thou, too, but tears and lamentations and a heaviness of heart? Hast thou no voice but the voice of sorrow and no tongue but the tongue to tell of woe?"

Nelson paused for a long time, but at last his response came to him and he raised his head.

"O Prince of Barbary," he replied in a loud and agitated voice, "I and my people rest under the shadow of a curse. My countenance is dark. Yea, the covering of my flesh is black. The Lord has marked me like a beast of the field. Yea, like the leopard has He marked me with a mark that changeth not until

the end of time. My people are of a nation that has been meted out and trodden under foot, and the sweat of servitude and bondage is my portion until I die."

A chorus of cries and groans arose and Aaron Green stepped down and, gathering up a handful of sawdust, sprinkled it on his head and groaned.

Then Red Shirt rose to his feet slowly and majestically. He swelled out his chest and held his head high.

"O Prince of Barbary," he said, "incline dine ear ter mer voice an' listen ter de wu'ds uv mer mouf. De ways uv de Lawd is pas' ornstan', but de seeker atter trufe, he shall sholy fin' hit."

The preacher turned and gazed at Red Shirt as though in surprise. Then he came forward and Red Shirt whispered for some moments in his ear. He drew back suddenly and then, dropping on his knees, cried in a loud voice: "Praised be the Lord!"

Some few negroes took up the cry, but the majority were silent. They did not fully understand the ceremonies they were witnessing, but the seeming great knowledge of Aaron Green and his two friends, and the practice of the various mysteries connected with the Brotherhood, impressed them deeply and filled them with reverence and almost fear of these men.

Aaron Green now took his seat, and Red Shirt produced something from the folds of his robe and handed it to the preacher. When it was unwrapped, it seemed to be a book with about half a dozen stiff and rather thick pages. The preacher gazed at it for a moment when Red Shirt spoke and said:

"Eat de book!"



He lifted it slowly to his mouth and began to eat it, page after page. All over the hall negroes started to their feet and gazed with wondering eyes at the strange spectacle. Not a sound was heard save the crunching of the preacher's jaws on the dry sheets of bread, except now and then some quivering, suppressed sigh as a negro sank back into his seat. The three men who sat in the northern end of the hall had used up nearly a peck of flour in making and frying sheets of bread thin enough and tough enough to be fastened together in the semblance of a book, and it was no wonder the negroes about the hall gazed with wondering eyes at the unusual sight. Still the preacher continued to eat, and when he had finished he rose slowly to his feet and gazed for a few moments about the hall, which was now as still as death. Then he began to speak in clear, strong tones, so that each negro caught his words clearly.

"Thus said the Lord unto his prophet Ezekiel:

*"And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious.*

*But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth and eat that I give thee.*

*And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein;*

*And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe.*

*Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that*

*thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel.*

*So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll.*

*And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.*

*And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them.'"*

After repeating these words, the preacher paused for a long time. At last he stretched his arms out over them with a gesture of blessing and protection.

"O Princes and brothers," he cried, "full light has come unto me, and the heart of the Lord, as far as my people are concerned, lies before me as an open book. Words of wisdom have come into mine ear and verily do I believe that the curse of our people shall be lifted. To him who sits here, has much of this wisdom come long ago, but he has imparted it to me. I have also eaten the book of the Lord with the wisdom therein contained and have been sanctified as a prophet among you.

"This man is your king, as yet unchosen by you, but he has been gracious to his servant and has counseled wisely. He has told me of a prophecy which shall come to pass and, in the eating of the roll, have I found his words to be indeed true. Brethren! O my brethren! Your sorrows shall utterly pass away."

"Glory ter de Lawd!" exclaimed numerous voices.

Aaron Green stood erect, and, gazing at the three inferior officers, exclaimed in a loud voice:

“O Princes of Kaffraria, Senegambia and Somali, meet me by the Congo on the borders of the land of Wamba Darda the king, that we may counsel together.”

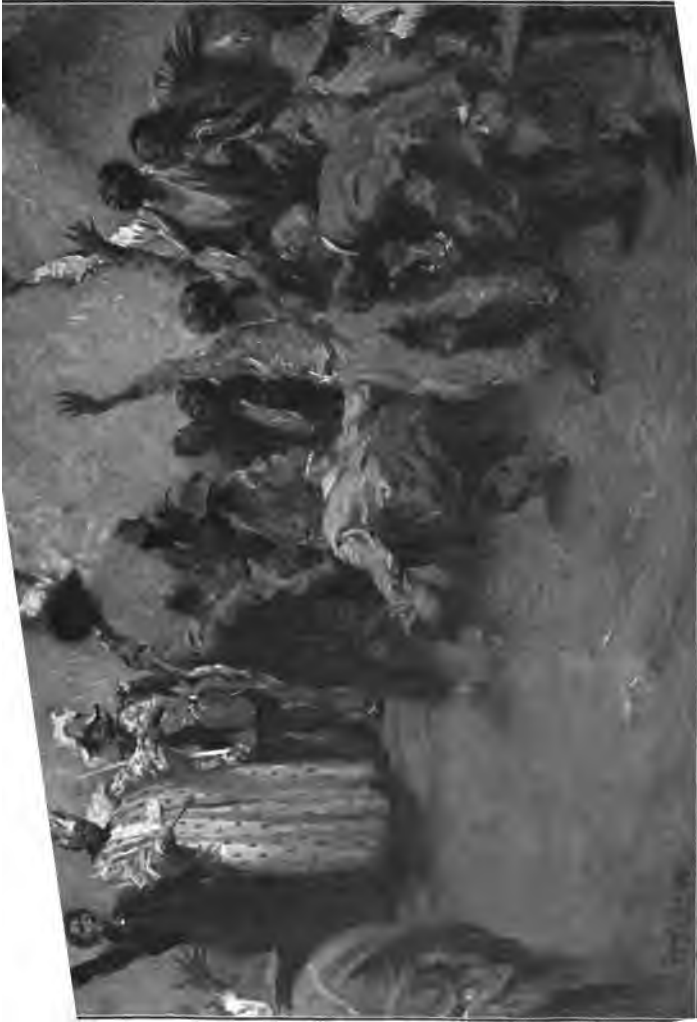
Jack Meadows, Dick Johnson and Nelson Riley advanced to the center of the hall, where the preacher joined them, holding in his hand a little L-shaped receptacle which Red Shirt had handed to him. It was the one that had been used at the initiations and contained a drop of blood from each member of the Brotherhood. Into the ear of each the preacher whispered for a moment, then he exhibited the receptacle and whispered again. Immediately a shout broke from them, and each, taking his side of the hall, whispered into the ears of the members. As the words came to each negro, he sprang to his feet with a shout, and the whole assembly was soon in an uproar. Then the officers resumed their stations, while Aaron Green stepped forward and waited for the noise to subside. Red Shirt rose and uncovered his head.

“And he shall be our king!” cried the preacher in a loud voice.

“And he shall be our king!” was the response from every tongue. Then the preacher called in a loud voice:

“I hear wind in the mulberry tree. It is a sign that the day draws nigh. I hear the wind; it is the east wind, and it wrought their mighty deliverance.”

All the negroes rose to their feet as one man and began to sing:



The whole assembly was soon in an uproar

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**R L**

"I am boun' fer de promus' lan-a-an',  
 I am boun' fer de promus' la-an',  
 O-o-h, who-oo will come an' go-o wid me-e?  
 I-I am boun' fer de promus' la-an'."

Then the crowd sat down and a babel of voices arose. Whisky was once more passed around, and every one of the negroes, with the stealing of the liquor to his brain, was seized with a fanatical fervor. Aaron Green sat conversing with Red Shirt. Who was he? they asked themselves. Where did he get all the money? Who was De Quina and how came it that their preacher was one of the three wise men? They could not understand, so they gazed on the glittering crown and the gorgeous uniform with wonder and admiration, but they did not doubt.

After Aaron Green had talked with Red Shirt for some time, the latter arose and exclaimed:

"Let dere be silence!"

Instantly the chatter ceased. Sentences that had been begun were never finished. All eyes were turned toward the strange being who was now quietly sitting on his throne, the glittering crown upon his head, the curiously spotted robe folded about his body and the white pelt hanging suspended from his shoulder.

Red Shirt waved his hand to the preacher, who stepped forward to the edge of the platform. His face was almost ashy and the huge L-shaped thing that hung at his breast looked strangely spotted as it lay against his dark gown.

"Good Gawd!" whispered one negro to another.  
 "Dat L business on de preacher looks perzackly lak er

piece er rattlesnake. Watch it clost an' hit 'pears ter wiggle an' twis' eroun'."

The preacher lifted it high in air and they regarded it curiously.

"It is a sign, my brothers," he cried triumphantly.

"It is a sign."

He let it fall until it hung again against his breast, and then began to speak.

"This man who sits before you was not made a king by you to-night. He is by birth a king and born of a kingly line. Who is he and where is he from? This you will doubtless ask, and so I will tell you.

"In the center of that land from which your fathers came, the great continent known to the world as Africa, this man was born. There in the Dar Banda region, at the head of the tributaries of the Ubangi River, was his principal village and, through the multitude of his spear-men, he controlled the country from the Congo on the south up to the margin of the waste places on the north. Tribe after tribe fell under his dominion and the fear of his name spread throughout the land. Happy he was, and free from care, for the enemies that rose before him were swept away like chaff before the wind, and came no more. Thus he went along through life, feeling his might through his many vassals, but knowing naught of his importance in the world, nor of the wondrous things it should fall to his lot to do.

"One day a party of his men, while hunting, captured a white man, a youth who had strayed from some exploring party and had lost his way. He was brought before the king and, in token of his humility,

he was stripped of his garments and a loin cloth alone covered his nakedness.

“On that day did the heart of Wamba Darda become heavy and sick. In the white skin and splendid physique of this youth, the king’s eyes saw a beauty beyond compare. The ugly covering of his own flesh, and the heavy form of his features and those of his people, became hateful to him, so that he hid himself with his idols and prayed that they might change him to match this wondrous being who was his captive.

“Day after day the youth was brought before the king until he felt in his heart a hatred against the stranger, yet could not find courage to do him to death.

“About that time a king in the Uganda region denied Wamba Darda’s supremacy over certain territory, and our king, in the bitterness of his soul, rejoiced that he could thus let out his sorrow in the frenzy of battle, and led his spear-men forth to war.

“After the first onslaught was made, Wamba Darda’s men pressed on and drove the enemy back to the shores of a mighty lake, where they broke and fled in disorder to their principal village. Then it was that, as the king’s men pressed forward, led by the king himself, a tall, powerfully-built man came and, standing in the way, lifted his hands with the salutation of peace. The king halted his men and word was brought to him that his opponent was dead, but he desired to burn the village and capture the cattle and lead the people away captive. Then the tall man came before him, and, speaking in his own tongue, said:

“O King Wamba Darda, live for ever! Throughout



the earth have I sought you, for the mission you have in this world is far beyond the burning of a petty village.'

"Then was the king filled with wonder and stood and listened to the words of the stranger. He ordered his men to gather round the man and warned him that, should his story prove untrue and be but a ruse to save the fleeing enemy, his life would be forfeit. The stranger bowed low and then continued to speak.

"'I, O King,' he said, 'am a Prince of Abyssinia and a Christian. My people have been Christians since the elder days and have loved the Word and striven to follow the Law. Lately there has risen among us a prophet who came to my father, the king, and said: "Send thy son to the ear of the rhinoceros whose horn lies broken and afloat. Bid him journey thence toward the throat of the same and he shall meet a mighty king, surrounded by a mighty army, and on all sides shall lie the dead and dying and the wails of the black men shall fill his ear. Then shall he know his search is ended when he shall find that in the heart of this king there is a sorrow because of the curse he knows naught of."' He gazed into the king's face and cried: 'Hast thou in thy heart, O Wamba Darda, the king, a sorrow because the covering of thy flesh is black and thou art unlike the beauty that thy heart desires?'

"Then did the king answer him in wonder, for to no one had he spoken of the sorrow that gnawed within him always.

"'O King Wamba Darda!' he replied, 'turn to thy home again and I will accompany thee. There will I

teach thee and give to thee thine instructions and in the end will I leave thee to thy task.'

"So they traveled to the head village on the Ubangi River and there, during many months, did this Prince of Abyssinia teach to your king the religion of the Christians. Then did the king learn of the curse that God had laid upon the men of that land, and in his sorrow he would not be comforted. Day after day, he left the village and wandered in the forest; his heart was bowed down with grief, and fervent prayers for his people were ever on his lips. One day the prince came to him and said:

"'O King, the lesson is ended. The day of my departure is at hand. Peace be to you, and may the mercy of God attend you! The prophecy directs that you must wander in this land until a sign shall come to you. It shall be a sign of humility, the sign of the bended knee, and it shall remain with you always and never leave you. When that sign has come, you will know that the leopard can indeed change its spots, and the first part of the prophecy shall be fulfilled. Thereafter you must travel, and your journey will lead you to the eye of the rhinoceros, and then there shall come to you the knowledge which will direct you on your way.'

"Long did the king ponder over these directions and, as the prince made ready to depart, he called him aside.

"'O thou, who dost speak in riddles,' he cried, 'where shall I find the eye of the rhinoceros?'

"The Abyssinian turned and said: 'In the days that were, ere yet the curse fell upon this land, Mada-

gascar lay as the head of a rhinoceros, mighty to toss the world, but it now lies apart in the sea as a token that it remains helpless and defenseless against the nations of the earth. The people who inhabit it shall be a prey to the other peoples of the world, until the curse of the Lord is lifted and the Ethiopian shall change his skin.'

"Then did Wamba Darda, the king, deliver his kingdom to his brother and depart alone, wandering through the wilderness for many months. The great beasts of the jungle rose about him; the poisonous serpent started at his feet and the python hung above him in the trees, but he went among them unafraid, and they scattered from his path and did him no harm. Then did he know that the words of the Abyssinian were indeed true, and his heart was filled with gladness. After many months, he came to the land of the Mindangos and ascended to the summit of Mount Loma, where the Kong Mountains break away to the northeast and to the northwest, forming upon the land a mighty letter L. So he stood there upon the summit of the mountain with his face to the north, sorrowing over the woes of his people. Away above him and to the north, there floated one lone cloud, but, except for this, the heavens were calm and serene. Suddenly from this cloud there sped a flash of lightning, and he stood blinded by the light. There came a crash and a roar and then, burned upon his chest, there stood a picture of the mountains, the letter L, the Sign of the Bended Knee."

Red Shirt here rose from his seat and, advancing to the front of the stand, bared his chest and, under the

light in the hall, the rough scar was visible to every eye. A fear of the man crept over them and they sat as silent as death. Red Shirt gazed at them for a moment and then said:

“De Sign uv de Bended Knee.”

Then he fastened his robe and took his seat in silence.

“From that mountain,” continued the speaker, “the king descended, led by some unseen force; and then he journeyed for many months toward the east until he came to the White Nile, when, at the edge of a jungle, there suddenly appeared before him one day a leopard as white as driven snow. The animal advanced and stood before the king, and into Wamba Darda’s heart there came the knowledge that he must kill it. He raised his spear and drove it home and the beast fell dead, but not one drop of blood spurted from the wound to dye the skin, nor did it struggle in the throes of death.”

Red Shirt rose again and exhibited to them the bogus white leopard skin that Aaron Green had had prepared from the skins of white rabbits when he went away to make the last purchases, which were afterward received at the house of De Quina, the barber, and there kept with the arms and ammunition. Not a sound was heard in the building; the throats of the negroes were dry. They felt they were witnessing the results of something supernatural and their hearts quaked within them.

“Then the king journeyed to the south,” continued the speaker, “being led by the unseen force and carrying with him the skin of the leopard which he had

dried in the sun. Southward he journeyed week after week, until he came to Lake Bangweolo, the eye of the rhinoceros, and there he tarried, reading daily from the book that the Abyssinian had given him. And, in spite of his great faith, yet read he each day of the curse of God and sorrowed in his heart.

“*Woe unto the land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia.*”

“He grieved in his heart each day for the curse that was upon the land, that her people should be scattered and broken in spirit, a nation meted out and trodden under foot.

“And so he sat by the lake in that far country and in the sorrow of his heart he wept and bowed him down in grief. And it came to pass that, as he wept, he fell asleep, and in that sleep there came to him a vision wherein darkness was made light before him.

“So has he, my brothers, walked from that day even unto this in the light of that prophecy, and he will, as an instrument of that prophecy and of the will of the Lord, bring to pass the things that appeared in a vision and were told to the wise man of Abyssinia. For, as the leopard has changed its spots, so also shall the Ethiopian change his skin, and the curse of the Lord shall depart from you and from your race for ever and for ever.”

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE WIND OF THE WILDERNESS

The following evening the negroes met again at the log church on Willow Island. All day long they had worked at the mill, but with little interest in their labors. They knew that when they should gather together again the plans would be told to them and they would know the end of the mystery and be called upon to obey the commands of their king. Even before the organization of the society, and long before it had developed into the Brotherhood of the Letter L, they had been banded together in their hearts against the white man. Now there were stronger ties to bind them. There was the oath, the penalty of which was death. There was the racial fellowship and the mingling of the blood in one receptacle, and above all, there was the earnest and steadfast belief that they awaited the commands of the chosen of the Lord and were but instruments to be used in working out the will of the Almighty.

When they met that evening they were impatient at even the short delay caused by the ceremony of opening the lodge. They hungered for the knowledge that was to come and, when the customary allowance of whisky had been received, they turned their eyes toward the platform where sat the king, the general,

and he who was the preacher, the prophet and the privy counselor.

Aaron Green rose and, advancing to the front of the platform, held his Bible high above his head. A silence fell upon the assembled crowd. Far in the distance sounded the howling of a dog. Long and mournfully it howled, and a chill of fear and awe crept from man to man. The whites of their eyes gleamed as they glanced toward each other. Then their gaze fastened once more upon the face of the man garbed in the long black robe. Slowly his arm descended and the silence grew intense. Then his voice sounded, strong, deep and resonant.

*"Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work."*

There was a rapt look upon the preacher's face and his eyes gleamed with the fire of religious transport.

Slowly and deliberately he repeated the passage, so that its meaning might sink deep into the hearts of his hearers.

*"Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work."*

He stood for some moments, his lips pressed tightly together and his face quivering with excitement. He held the Bible before him with his fingers laced about it. There was a strange beating in his ears and the blood raced through his veins from the fierce pounding of his heart.

Well Aaron Green knew what he was about to do. Well did he know the sacrilege of the character that he was about to play. It was very dark outside and a rain was beginning to fall. He could hear it patter upon the board roof high above him, but it had not yet begun to spatter from the eaves. Above the building, in which he, a liar and a blasphemer, was about to preach a doctrine of blood and hate, there stood a cross, a rude and simple emblem to tell to the world that it sheltered those who had accepted a religion of love and mercy and were followers of the meek and lowly Nazarene, the Emanuel who had come and gone so long before.

It was because of these thoughts that the blood of the white man in him faltered; it was for this that his negro blood quailed, but the blood of the red man, like oil upon troubled waters, glided through and eased the pounding of his heart and composed the nervous twitching of his frame. Somewhere in him there was something that almost believed the words he was minded to utter, and he clung with an exertion of will power to that something, and in a moment or two the hesitation had passed and he was calm once more. Then he began to speak slowly and deliberately in a low tone that was, nevertheless, loud enough, through some peculiar carrying power in its timbre, to be plainly heard in the farthest corners of the hall.

“Black men, my brothers! Thus said the Lord of Hosts unto His prophet, Jeremiah, and thus do I, the servant of the Lord, to whom and to whose king wondrous things have been revealed, now say: Woe unto him; woe unto him!



"My brothers, the day of your deliverance is at hand. There will, perhaps, be a short, hard struggle through the Wilderness, but the green fields and pleasant brooks of the Promised Land are but a little distance from us and will soon be gained.

"For those of our race who are dead and gone, we will not weep. For those that have closed their eyes in death, we will shed no tears. They have passed from among us, and let us believe, O my brothers, that somewhere in the realms of eternal life, the shackles of slavery have fallen from their weary limbs and the scars of the whip-lash have been erased. Let us believe, O my brothers, that the curse of God is no more upon them, and that each helpless soul, as it sped from the heart-sick, broken body, has been comforted at the Throne of Mercy as it came crying: 'Lord, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

"It is for the living and to the living that I would speak.

"My brothers, the hand of the white man is against you, I care not in what country or what clime. From one end of this broad and beautiful land even to the farthest extremity thereof there stands against you a changeless and undying hate.

"It matters not that vast armies have come from the North and men have shouted that it was for the purpose of gaining your freedom. I tell you, my brothers, it was a hideous lie! It matters not that their thousands fell in battle, that their newspapers and their preachers proclaimed it was for your freedom and that alone. I brand it again as a cowardly lie and rotten to the core. The scales have fallen from

our eyes and the tumult of their shouting can not longer drown the voice of truth.

"Listen, my brothers, for this is the story as time has told it. *By their fruits ye shall know them* will be as true a thousand years hence as it is to-day. At Appomattox was their wondrous tree planted yesterday, and, oh, but our hearts were glad! On this day do we eat of its fruit, as for days and days that are past and gone, and we have hoped that its flavor would change and have comforted ourselves with the belief that perhaps it was not yet ripe. My brothers, I tell you that as time goes by it rots upon the tree. It is unfit for food.

"My brothers, water can not rise higher than its source except in the momentary splatterings from impetus. In those days it splattered here and it splattered there. Some negro received his dues because of the mad rush of the mendacious flood, and we believed that it was the beginning of the fulfilment of their promises. But lo! it has settled back to its source and the froth and the foaming of it is gone, and we know it for what it was,—a cowardly lie!

"My brothers, those men from the North came through political jealousy and hatred,—through envy of the Southern white man and slave-owner, and as a result of the discord that arose in the struggle for political power. They came with their armies, shouting: 'Brother! Brother!' You were to be their equals, their brothers indeed. Read the writings of the man who headed them all, who called out their armies to battle and bade them haste in their work, and then, black men, you will know that it was a

hideous lie and monstrous in the sight of God. I challenge every state of this Union, both North and South.

“What says Massachusetts, the old Bay State?” the preacher went on. “What says she, though her regiments have shouted of freedom over the burning homes of men who were of their own blood? Oh, her garments were clean and she was purged in freedom’s cause, but when did the mantle of righteousness fall about her shoulders? Loud did she shout to the South of the mote that was in its eye, but, O God of gods, the beam that glittered in her own at New Orleans!

“What says Massachusetts? Let her go, if she can, and gaze down into the depths of the sea where the bones of thousands of negroes lie buried in the mud and ooze, tossed dead and dying from the slave-ships that fitted in her ports and were owned and manned by her children. Oh, those gallant sons of witch-dippers! What haloes of glory do they wear indeed!

“Ah, Massachusetts, Massachusetts! When did the garment of righteousness fall about your shoulders? It came, my brothers, when the gold poured no more into her coffers from the sale of the bodies of black men. Then did she look toward the South with envious eyes, and, with a lie in her throat, proclaim herself our friend.

“But I do not chide her for what she did. No, my brothers, I praise her for that she brought about the death of thousands upon thousands of white men, both in her own domains and in the South. God bless

her for the blood she spilt, but curse her for that she lives to-day!

"Some men in the North may have believed it was for your sake. If they did, they were fools. Some of the men who trailed along with the armies from the North and who remained to dwell in the South still profess to believe it. They are filthy, cowardly liars. They are but the flyblows that were left by the invasion, as these blue-bottles from the North paused here and there to burn, loot and ravage through the land. Their working place may be found in the viands that are from time to time thrown out from Washington. There they burrow and tunnel and gorge and grow fat,—do these human maggots,—and when a stench arises from their feeding and they quarrel among themselves, as the time draws nigh for the head dumper to have the stuff carted away from Washington's political kitchen door, then do they remember you and cry: 'Stand in line, brother! Stand in line and do not forsake me, for I love you truly, O my colored brother! I love you truly!'

"Oh, they lie to you, black men, and have lied for, lo, these many years! They are unworthy to associate with the least among you, and had it not been that things will change and we will sweep away these maggots along with the men, I would say to you that the finger of scorn of the lowest negro in the land should be turned to them for ever. Oh, but the disgust of it! Oh, but the filth of it!

"Are these men your friends? Have they been your friends? I tell you they are not and never have been. You have been as their counters in a game of steal.

They have sold you and every hope you ever had, and they have duped you with their singing of the story of your woes.

"If you do not believe what I say of them, go and ask one of them for the hand of his daughter in marriage and see what he will say. He will tell you that the laws prohibit such a marriage, even while he holds his dastardly arm about your shoulders and prates to you of friendship. He will refuse you, for he considers himself better than either you or the Southern white man,—a Norman among Britons and Saxons.

"Go make the same request of a Southern white man and a load of buck-shot will be your portion. It is the same old thing, the same old hatred. The one with the friendly hand and the cowardly, equivocal reply; the other with the merciless shot-gun and the unconcealed hatred and contempt.

"Again, again: Look to the South! What says Virginia? the Mother of States, with the grandest lie upon her escutcheon that human insolence ever conceived. Go, darken the face of him that lies prone on the ground and make of him a black man, a negro! Take the whip from his hand and place it in the hand of her who has spurned him with her foot, and then write upon her banner: 'Thus to my black brother, whom God placed here on earth to live with me and whom Christ died to save.'

"Ah, God, but Virginia has a day of reckoning that, if meted out justly and fully, will desolate her from her mountains to her sea!

"And what says South Carolina, the Harry Hotspur

of the Union, with the bones of a thousand dead slaves rotting in her swamps and rice-fields and her thousands of living ones trodden under foot and beaten down? What say they all? Let them answer truly: It is hatred,' or they lie!"

The speaker paused as though to invite dispute, but there was no reply. Although much of the language of his speech was above the comprehension of his hearers, yet the thought that ran through it all was as clear to them as the noonday sun. He had risen above and beyond them, and the emotion that filled his heart drove him to an eloquence that strengthened with his theme, until their ignorance was forgotten and their wrongs were voiced in a language meant only for the telling and without regard for the understanding of those to whom it was told. Tense, eager faces and glistening eyes were directed toward him in fascination.

"If they tell you they do not hold a doctrine of hatred for the black man, then they lie, lie, lie!"

"Amen!" rose from a deep voice in a far corner. "Amen, Lawd! Amen!" was echoed round.

The speaker paused until the cries had subsided.

"Ask the men in the North, who shout and rave of lynching in the South,—ask of them, I say, who are the men that are working in their factories? Then they will tell you, if they speak the truth, that the white men in the North will not work beside a negro in a factory.

"Go among them, if you will, and settle there in large numbers and you will see a change. They will go even farther than the men of the South, for here

white men are accustomed to your presence. Here, unless lynched, you can at least exist, but there you would be driven away, mobbed and murdered without mercy.

“And how about the lynching that they prated about some years ago? How well I remember how they howled about it when a negro was burned in Texas! The thing has spread, my brothers, to the land in the North, and their newspapers speak lightly, where they used to flame the story forth to the world as an outrage against civilization.

“Some of you may say: ‘Oh, but they are good to us up there in the North. Young women in Boston make speeches about our sorrows, and rich men in New York and Chicago and all their larger cities send money to found schools and colleges for our race. Every year they send their thousands, and we have good negroes who go North and tell them of our condition and get money and are lifting us up. These men in the North want to see us rise, and we know they love us, for they help us.’

“My brothers, I tell you the old men and old women up there who send money for your schools and colleges are a lot of brain-sick fools. They build you a college as they would found an asylum for sick cats, and they tell you they are lifting you up.

“Lifting you up, are they? Lifting you up to what? Lifting you up to themselves. It is nothing on God’s green earth, my brothers, but the egotistical insolence of the personal point of view.

“In what are they above you? In education? What does that matter? It is but a social question, after

all, and leads no man nearer to his God. Are they better at heart? Did they make the money honestly?

"Ah, my brothers, in how many instances has the money they have sent been wrung from trade by the sale of stuff wrought by the weary fingers of starving women and girls in the sweat-shops of their cities! How much of it was stolen by these commercial princes? Nine-tenths of it is dirty money, and it will bring no good to you.

"Alas! there are men of our own race who seek to lift you up by educating you. The arts and the sciences are to be yours, and they dream that some day you may go forth with wide and useful knowledge at your command, and the white man and the black man will walk through the world side by side in peace and with plenty for all.

"My brothers, it is wrong,—it is all wrong. As long as present conditions exist this education offered you, even though it be in the sciences and the trades alone, is but the beginning of the end.

"To-day there is in the South but little competition between the whites and the blacks, and they may live in comparative peace, but as soon as we begin to tread on the white man's toes, as soon as we begin to compete with him for honor and fortune in the fields that are now his, on that day shall we learn the full measure of his hatred and eat the apples of Sodom that are as ashes and dust in the mouth.

"What good will education do us? None! It will but bring us quicker to our doom.

"I say to these black men who would educate us that they are fools. Rather give to us the wine of



ignorance that, drinking thereof, we may be joyful and remember our sorrow no more.

“Why give education and ambition to the negro if he may never command? Why put the arts, the sciences and the trades in his hand if he may never be superior?”

“No, my brothers, the whole plan is wrong. The education they offer to you is as the apple in the garden of Eden. Let it alone, for on the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die.

“How do I know? Ah, how do I know? My brothers, I will tell you. I know because I have eaten thereof and the light and happiness of my life have gone out. I can look back on the days of my youth, the days of ignorance and credulity and simple happiness, and I would to God that they might never have passed.

“An individual may rise here and another there, but when the race is educated, it will be destroyed.

“My brothers, there is no escape from the conditions that surround us, except by one road. It is hate, hate, hate! and we must meet it with hate.

“I have not come here to rehearse to you the story of your woes. You know them too well. I have not come to add to your despair, nor even to dwell upon the curse that rests upon our race throughout the world.

“I stand as the mouthpiece of one who has come from a land beyond the seas to help you and to save you. He has come to you a king in disguise and has humbled himself by working at your side, that he might the better understand the measure of your

despair and meet your needs with the manna of freedom and happiness.

"I have eaten the roll,—the roll of wisdom,—and I know that the sign and word, with which he has come, is given to us by the Lord, even as a Pillar of Fire, to direct us on our journey!"

Aaron Green paused for a moment, his whole frame quivering with emotion. Then he cried in a loud voice:

"My people, O, my people! In the name of him who sits before you and in the name of Him who rules on high, I offer to you a kingdom all your own. I offer to you freedom. I offer to you riches and happiness, with never a white man within the borders of your land. Will you take it? Will you accept it?"

In an instant every negro in the house was on his feet and their shouts broke forth as a mighty roar. Red Shirt rose and spread forth his hands, and after a few moments they settled back in their seats and the preacher began again to speak.

"Therefore do I say to you that surely it shall come to pass as it is written; even the words of the Lord God through the mouth of His prophet, Jeremiah.

"The Lord has said: *'Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.'*

"Brethren, I say unto you that the Ethiopian will change his skin, even as the leopard has changed his spots, and the white man will depart from his evil ways. This I say as the mouthpiece of him who has come, bearing in his heart a mighty love for his brothers and upon his breast the Sign of the Bended

Knee, the wondrous letter L, stamped there by God Himself.

"Brethren, I say to you that L is Love. I say to you that L is Light. I say to you that L is Liberty!"

Shouts again rose throughout the hall, but the preacher spread his arms above the negroes and they hushed.

"My brothers, there is a prophecy contained in the Bible, that great book of the Law and the Prophets, which tells of this day. What does it say, my brothers? Listen to the prophecy. Listen to the Scripture." He opened his Bible and fingered the pages for a moment.

"I read to you," he said, "from the thirteenth chapter of Jeremiah.

*"And I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together, saith the Lord: I will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy, but destroy them."*

"My brothers, they have been dashed together, the white men of the North and the white men of the South, father against son and brother against brother. Ask of Manassas; ask of the Wilderness; ask of Shiloh and Appomattox and of a thousand other battle-fields, and you will know. The white men of the North have conquered. What does it say further? Listen to the prophecy:

*"The cities of the south shall be shut up, and none shall open them; Judah shall be carried away captive, all of it; it shall be wholly carried away captive."*

"My brothers, the cities of the South have been shut up, but ye should have risen and put the people to the sword. No king and no prophet came to you and

there was no great general to command you, and so you lost the opportunity. The men of the North whom you believed in have failed you, your deliverers have gone away, as was prophesied.

"Listen to the prophecy :

*"Lift up your eyes, and behold them that come from the north: where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?"*

"Good Gawd!" exclaimed one negro, no longer able to conceal his wonder and excitement. "Hit's in de Book ; hit's in de Lawd's own Book!"

"Yes," replied the preacher, "it is in the Book ; it is the prophecy. The black man failed to rise and strike when his power could have been felt. This also has been written. They hailed the Yankees as deliverers and put them in high places. They fed that hatched-out spawn, that flyblow, the carpet-bagger, who has used them for years and by thousands as counters in a game of pie-grabbing, and each of whose dollars at the present day records some trust betrayed, some confidence abused.

"Listen to the prophecy :

*"What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee? for thou has taught them to be captains, and as chief over thee: shall not sorrows take thee, as a woman in travail?"*

"My brothers, you have made them to be captains over you and as chiefs, and until the coming of your king there was no help and your despair grew greater from day to day.

"Listen to the prophecy :

*"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard*

*his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.'*

"My brothers, the leopard has changed his spots and the Ethiopian shall change his skin.

"This man who has come among you is your king, and you, who are assembled here to-night, shall be princes and rulers on the earth. Gold shall be yours and riches beyond the desires of man. Your persecutors shall pass away, and with the aid of your king, who is truly a king and born of a kingly line, it shall come to pass with your enemies as it has been written. Listen, my brothers. Listen to the prophecy:

*"Therefore will I scatter them as the stubble that passeth away by the wind of the wilderness.'"*

Again a shout arose and they yelled like a frenzied mob, but the preacher calmed them by shaking his head and spreading his hands above them.

"My brothers, we have money with which to carry out our plans and shall have much more. We have arms and ammunition and the plans are ripe. The black men all over the South are panting beneath the burden they bear, and they will take up arms with us, and we shall surely conquer. What do we desire? We desire this beautiful Southern land. Let them go to the frozen North and dwell, if they will, those that we leave alive, but thousands of their men we will put to the sword, and the fairest of their women shall be ours. How shall the Ethiopian's skin be changed? It shall be changed in the children that these women shall bear to the black men. You may take as many of their beauties as you can provide for. Their cities shall be ours and their plantations shall

be ours, their banks, their railroads, their forests and their mines.

"How came the leopard's skin to be snowy white? How came the initial letter of Liberty, Light and Love stamped upon the breast of our king?"

"My brothers, God is with us. The God of mercy has heard our cry, and for our prayers He has given us the Sign of the Bended Knee as a token. The God of mercy has heard us and the God of battles will guide the spotted banner to victory, to Light, to Love and to Liberty.

"Oh, but some may cry that they are many, that they are mighty in war and strong in battle.

"Yes, but like the Assyrian of old, they will melt away. The lone man with the midnight torch and the repeating rifle is a host in himself. We will fight them openly if they resist and we will fight them also from the edge of the path, as they journey through the land, and we will fight them as they flee from their burning homes.

"This, my brothers, is the story of your salvation, and, up in the Black Belt, where we are ten to one, we will destroy the white men in a night and will raise an army that, through the guidance of your king and General de Quina, will sweep its way to victory. Not because of might alone shall we prevail, but because of the Lord, who is our strength and our Redeemer."

He raised his arms toward Heaven and cried in a loud voice:

"Praise the Lord, O my soul! All that is within me, praise His holy name!"

The preacher took his seat and, almost as one man,

the crowd rose and began to sing a song ; it was their old, old song—the song of the Promised Land.

When it was over the lodge was quickly closed and the members departed to their homes through the driving rain, fanatical in the belief that the Lord Himself had spoken to them through the mouth of Aaron Green, the preacher.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE SIGN OF THE LETTER

The rain had lasted through the greater portion of the night, and during the early hours of the morning a heavy wind arose, accompanied from time to time by crashes of vivid lightning. The wind at last strengthened almost to a storm and its violence awakened many negroes in the mill settlement.

Red Shirt, De Quina and Aaron Green had been unable, or at least unwilling, to return to Granville through the downpour of rain, and remained at the house of Jack Meadows, who prepared a room for them. The preacher slept on a bed, but Red Shirt and De Quina made pallets on the floor and composed themselves to rest.

When the wind grew violent every one in the house was awakened, and the negroes arose and lighted a lamp. Jack Meadows, hearing them talking together and stirring about, came into the room and sat with them.

The lightning began to flash nearer and more frequently, and suddenly there was a blinding flash, quickly followed by a deafening roar.

Jack Meadows had been standing with his face flattened against a window-pane, but he sprang back as the flash came.



"Good God!" he exclaimed. "It struck the church; I saw it as plain as day."

In a few moments they had pulled on some clothing and were hurrying away through the darkness, carrying buckets and pans with which to bring water from the river to extinguish the fire in case there should be one. They stumbled and ran all the way to Willow Island and, crossing the bridge, reached the log building, but found everything seemingly as usual. There was no sign of a fire.

"Let's look inside," suggested the preacher.

So they opened the door and, after lighting one of the lanterns, found that some of the boards with which the building was roofed had been displaced and the rain was falling through.

They remained in the building for an hour or more, discussing the affairs of the Brotherhood, when the storm suddenly abated and the rolling of the thunder grew fainter and fainter. At last all was quiet and they could hear the occasional dropping of the water from the eaves.

Taking the lantern with them, they left the building and closed the door. As they started away De Quina stooped and picked up a heavy piece of wood about three feet in length. Stepping quickly back out of the light of the lantern, he dropped the piece of wood and, shading his eyes with his hands, gazed up at the roof of the church.

"By Gar!" he exclaimed suddenly. "De cross done be gone; de letter L, he now stay."

The others gathered quickly about him and he again shaded his eyes and gazed intently.

"*Madre de Dios!*" he cried. "Da' be one mirakal. It be de sign f'um God."

Silently the others gazed with straining eyes to catch the dim figure of the letter L, which now stood where the cross had been. The left end of the cross-piece had been knocked off by the lightning, leaving the other undamaged. Their hearts were filled with awe,—all but that of Red Shirt, who gazed for a moment, shrugged his shoulders and remained silent.

So far no word had escaped the preacher, but he now began to shiver and his teeth chattered.

"Let's go!" he said hoarsely; "I'm cold."

They returned quickly to Jack Meadows' house, and by the break of day the story was told about to the members of the Brotherhood, and each believed it to be a direct sign from God that their cause was His own. It was to be the new cross for the black man. Here was to be no emblem of the bloody sweat on Calvary; no religion of tears and of prayers for forgiveness for what some white woman had done in the garden of Eden thousands of years ago. There was to be a fellowship between God and the black man, and the religion was to be one of mutual love.

The preacher remained silent during these discussions. He took his departure at an early hour and went to his house on the west side of Granville, and there, lying face downward on his bed, he remained for an hour, almost motionless.

He was wavering between three interpretations of the strange occurrence. It might have been simply the chance work of a bolt of lightning. It might have been an expression, a direct expression from the Lord that

He was with them and their cause. Again, and his soul quaked with fear at the thought, it might have been a condemnation by the Lord of their murderous plans; an act on His part that swept away in an instant and, with a bolt of wrath, the hypocritical use of the emblem that stood above them and told of Christ and Him crucified. He arose and, staggering to his trunk, took out a bottle of whisky and drank deeply. Then he seated himself in his doorway and, with ashy face and anxious eyes, waited for he knew not what.

When the whistle at the mill blew for the hands to go to work a thing occurred that aroused the ire of Red Shirt and his lieutenants. The negroes, to a man, refused to take up their usual labors.

"Naw, suh, hit ain't no use," said one of them to Jack Meadows. "De good Gawd done say dat He on de winnin' side evvy pop, an' all us niggers sez is ter git de guns out an' us'll do de business."

Johnson, the foreman, stormed and swore. Mr. Oliver was sent for and grew black in the face with rage. Martin came and knocked down an insolent negro. No one seemed to know the cause of the trouble. There was no complaint about wages and they could not understand why the negroes were dissatisfied.

"Us des wants er hollerday," said one to Martin.

At last Jack Meadows brought them a direct command from Red Shirt to go to work, and they sullenly resumed their labors.

At the offices Mr. Oliver still stormed and raged.

"Holiday!" he cried angrily. "Oh, I'll give them a holiday all right! I am going to Montgomery this

very day and hire some state convicts. I will not put up with this any longer."

Martin tried to dissuade him, but he could not be moved from his purpose. In two hours' time he was in his buggy and ready to start. He placed a satchel containing a roll of bills under the seat and stuck a big revolver in his hip pocket.

"You had better leave that money here," said Martin, as he stood with his foot on the step of the vehicle.

"No! I'm going to bring back at least twenty-five convicts with me. I know where I can get them. When I return I'll fire every blasted nigger on the place and run simply the saw-mill part until I can get more convicts. I am done with niggers and,"—pounding his fist on his knee,—“I mean what I say.” Martin laughed.

"Why, they have gone to work all right," he said. "We may not have any more trouble with them. It was just a fool notion they had."

"To thunder with fool notions!" cried the president. "We didn't put up this plant to run it on fool notions. All the lumber we saw and stack now is gold dollars when we get the road through, and I am not going to take any more chances." So he settled himself in his buggy, lighted a cigar and drove toward Granville.

In less than five minutes after Mr. Oliver had taken his departure Ase, now a member of the Brotherhood, had slipped away and conveyed the information to Red Shirt and De Quina, and in doing so he did not fail to tell them about the roll of bills he had seen

placed in the satchel under the seat of the buggy. The men gazed at each other for a moment in silence. Then Red Shirt dismissed Ase with a wave of his hand.

"Go back! Dat be all right," he said.

"What be de bes' we do?" asked De Quina the moment Ase was out of the room. Red Shirt rose and walked slowly up and down the floor. Suddenly he turned and a cunning gleam stole into his eyes.

"Ketch him, by Gar!" he exclaimed. "Ketch him an' kill him an' stop dat game! Kill him an' git dat money!"

Aaron Green owned a horse, a strong, speedy animal, which he used in traveling about the country when preaching at different churches. Red Shirt thought of this horse, and the plan was quickly formed. They hurried to the preacher's house and in a few moments had hitched the animal to a buggy. A loaded Winchester rifle was placed between them, and Red Shirt had in his pocket the big revolver that was his constant companion.

De Quina caught up the lines, when Red Shirt suddenly exclaimed:

"Wait! I got de new lepper banner. Git dat!"

"Why?"

"Git it! I show you."

So they took the banner and placed it under the seat of the buggy and drove at a moderate speed until they were clear of the town. Red Shirt then drew a bottle from his pocket and, after the two had taken a drink, he leaned forward and took the lines from De Quina. He gave the horse a cut with the whip

and they started at a breakneck speed down the road which had been traveled by Mr. Oliver but a little while before.

"Mus' ketch him dis side Deer Creek Swamp," he said.

Mr. Oliver had been halted twice before he could pass Granville. At the bridge he met Slim Simpson, who accosted him and endeavored to make the same proposition he had made to Martin.

"Oh, go to the devil!" cried Mr. Oliver, who was in no mood for listening to mysterious tales or losing time with a character like Slim. "I'll send the revenue officers after you, you piney-woods trash!"

He drove on, and soon Slim saw a negro running toward him from the direction of the mill. He crouched down behind some sweet-gum bushes at the end of the bridge and waited. In a moment Ase came running at the top of his speed toward Granville. Slim rose to his feet and gazed after the negro, who was now hurrying up the hill. He ground his teeth in rage.

"It's all over now," he cried bitterly. "It's the last prayer of a soul that prayed to God for help. I prayed to Him and He would not hear me. I went to them and they mocked me."

He walked down the road toward his home, shaking his clenched fists and grinding his teeth. Then his mood seemed to change and, with bowed head and faltering steps, he went on his way, hardly knowing what he was about. His last hope was gone.

Slim Simpson had long known of the existence of the Brotherhood. He had suspected something when

the society had been organized, and, even before it had changed from a lot of horse-play and buffoonery to the blood-bound organization whose purpose was robbery, arson and murder, he had resolved to investigate it. Ase had given him his first definite information on the night when that negro had got drunk and had gone to whip Violet. He had learned the rest little by little after the members of the society had forced him to sell them his distillery by threats of prosecution, but in every instance where he had sought to make use of the information he had met with rebuffs. Now he gave it up in despair. He had come once more, after kneeling by his bedside and praying earnestly and tearfully that he might be received by them and might be successful. He had been told to go to the devil, and another threat of prosecution had been hurled at him. The burden of his woes settled on him like a pall. He shut his lips tightly and staggered homeward, wishing he might die.

After leaving Granville, where he had been stopped by Captain Brantley, who desired to talk with him about the sale of a tract of timber land, Mr. Oliver drove rapidly toward Pendleton, where he meant to take a train for Montgomery.

After a while his ire cooled somewhat; he no longer urged his horse, and the animal slackened its speed. After about two hours' drive he heard a buggy behind him and, turning, saw Red Shirt and De Quina. They drove up quickly and, at a wide place in the road, they passed him, lifting their hats politely. Their horse was covered with sweat and mud and appeared to have been driven furiously. He watched them as their

buggy whirled round a bend in the road, and followed after them with moderate speed. His train was to pass Pendleton at about four o'clock in the afternoon, and he had plenty of time to spare even after reaching his destination. Now that much of his anger had passed, he remembered several matters he should have attended to before leaving and regretted having hurried away and forgotten them.

Red Shirt and De Quina drove rapidly on for some miles, until at last they came to a long, dense swamp, known as Deer Creek Swamp. They crossed the bridge over the lazy stream and, after going a short distance, turned into a branch road, leading to the south. This had formerly been used as a timber road and was now grown up with small bushes. These were, however, too low and slight to interfere with their progress. After going some three hundred yards along this road, they hurriedly alighted and, leading the horse into the woods, fastened him securely, blanketed him with the lap-robe and returned to the public road. Red Shirt carried his revolver and De Quina was armed with the rifle. When they reached the road they concealed themselves in thick bushes on opposite sides of the sandy driveway and waited. Red Shirt was some ten feet ahead of De Quina.

At last they heard the sound of an approaching vehicle crossing the bridge. Red Shirt peeped out from the bushes.

"Dat's him," he called in a low tone, and then sank back out of sight.

When the buggy came opposite De Quina, Red Shirt sprang out and grasped the bridle near the bit,



Hurling the frightened animal back with a jerk of his powerful arm, he stood in front of it with his body thus protected, and covered Mr. Oliver with his revolver.

The president in an instant awoke from a reverie that had carried him many miles away and, with a startled exclamation, reached for his pistol.

"You move, by Gar! I blow out de brain," cried Red Shirt. Mr. Oliver dropped to his knees in the foot of the buggy, so as to shelter his body behind that of the horse, and drew his revolver. Before he could raise it De Quina sprang between the wheels and struck him over the head with the barrel of the rifle, almost stunning him. His weapon dropped from his hand and he slid forward on his face. Before he could recover, Red Shirt was in the buggy and had pinned him down in a grip that could not be easily broken.

"Lead de hawse on; I got him," he cried to De Quina.

The barber led the frightened animal quickly down the road and out into the branch road along which they had driven a short while before. Not a trace of the hold-up was left behind. There had been no struggle on the ground, no blood had been shed and no eye had seen them.

Mr. Oliver lay quiet in the foot of the buggy. His hands and feet had been bound by Red Shirt with strong bandana handkerchiefs, and the negro had stuffed his soft hat into the victim's mouth for a gag. He was powerless; his brain was confused from the blow he had received, and he felt he was suffocating,

but managed somehow to draw in enough breath to retain the spark of life.

At last De Quina led the horse from the bush-grown trail and they went deep into the swamp. The prisoner was lifted from the buggy, and, using the reins from the captured vehicle, they bound him in a sitting position, with his back to a tree. The gag was then taken from his mouth.

The men now opened the satchel, which was hidden under the seat, and found a little more than five hundred dollars. They were sorely disappointed, for Ase had led them to believe that there were thousands in the roll he had seen Mr. Oliver take from the safe in the office.

Red Shirt strode angrily up to the prisoner who, sitting tied as he was, was hardly able to move a muscle.

"Why you not got big lot money, you yaller dawg?" cried the negro.

Mr. Oliver's face was white with fear and the great pain he was in.

"If you let me go, I'll get a thousand dollars ransom for you," he said.

"Let off hell!" exclaimed Red Shirt. "By Gar! Mister Man, you got ter die. You t'ink I be de fool? No! I not be dat big fool."

He gazed at the prisoner for some moments with an intensity of hate. His small, black eyes gleamed wickedly, and his heavy, black lips were drawn back from his teeth with a snarl until his blue gums were exposed.

"You yaller dawg!" he hissed. "You been boss de

nigger all de time, but dis time you fin' out who de boss. I be de boss, by Gar! an' you be de dirty dawg."

He glared at the prisoner for a moment and then, stepping back, he kicked him full in the face with his heavy shoe.

The blood spurted from the wound. A strangled cry escaped Mr. Oliver's lips and he tugged and strained at his bonds, but to no effect.

"Oh, you cowardly black devil!" he cried. "If you want to kill me, kill and be done with it. I'll fight you, damn you, singly or both together, for a showing, you cowards."

De Quina slapped his thigh and laughed merrily.

"He be de polichinel," he cried. "You toucha de button an' he jumpa de monk." And again he laughed.

The blood was now running freely down Mr. Oliver's face and falling on his knees, but he made no further sound. There was a quivering of his cheek where the flesh had been ripped open by the kick in his face, but that was all.

Red Shirt came and, sitting down before him, laughed at him and mocked him and then spit in his face. Again he tugged at the lines with which he was bound. In a rage of despair he cursed the two men, hoping they would shoot him quickly and end it all.

De Quina, with a finer sense of cruelty, secured a stiff blade of grass and tickled his victim's nose. Then he thrust it into his eyes and ears. Changing his plan, he now thrust it up the nose and twirled it rapidly.

"Watch he sneeza!" he cried. "I bet, by Gar! he sneeza."

After a little while De Quina sat back and, rolling a cigarette, lighted it and began to recount to his victim a list of horrible things they meant to do to him before killing him. He told him also they meant to burn the mill and kill every white person in Granville. Mr. Oliver closed his eyes; he would not let them see the horror that shone in their depths, lest they find pleasure in it and torture him further.

At last Red Shirt, who was also smoking, rose to his feet.

"Aw, come on, an' finish de job," he said. "It not be too safe wait so long."

He went to where the preacher's buggy stood and returned with the spotted banner.

"Now, by Gar! you ornstan'?" he said to De Quina.

"Naw!" he replied. "I not ornstan'."

"By Gar, I change de lepper spot," replied the black man.

Mr. Oliver, seeing Red Shirt return, began to pray. Then he began to plead with them.

"I'll give you ten thousand dollars if you'll let me off," he cried piteously. "My God, have some mercy, men! How can you be so inhuman? If it's money you want, you'll get twenty times as much that way, and I will swear never to breathe a word of this, so help me God! What have I done to you?" he cried piteously, as he saw his prayers were without avail.

"You be de white man, dat whut you done," hissed Red Shirt, and, stepping forward, he kicked his victim full in the mouth, breaking his teeth.

Mr. Oliver spit out the broken pieces, and the blood poured from his lips.

"For Jesus' sake!" he sputtered.

"De Jesis business done play out an' de cross done gone ter hell," said Red Shirt, with a sneering laugh. His victim was silent.

"You belieb dat?" queried the negro. "No? Wall, by Gar! you fin' out. You go ter Knowledge Town in 'bout two minute now. Ef dat not be so, you be so kin' an' sen' me tellygraft when you git ter de stashun in dat town. I be you much t'ank." And he made a mock bow and laughed.

"Come on!" said De Quina. "We losa time."

Red Shirt produced a big knife.

"By-by, honey!" he said, as he sharpened the instrument on his shoe.

"Great God!" sputtered the victim, a horror freezing his blood and making the cold sweat gather on his bloody face. "Don't cut my throat! Shoot me! Please shoot me!"

"Hit be bery li'l pain, mister," said Red Shirt. "I been do dat 'bout ten time, an' dey allus seem satisfy. By Gar, dey not come back mek no kick. Wid yo' permission," he continued, with a mock bow, "I will now perceed ter cut yo' t'roat biff' yo' face, an' doan' fergit ter sen' me de tellygraft."

"For God's sake, shoot me!" bubbled Mr. Oliver. And then, raising his voice, he screamed: "Murder, murder!"

His lips were thick and swollen, his teeth were broken, and his cry sounded like that of some animal being butchered. Red Shirt stepped forward with his knife, but before he could use it the Cuban struck the prisoner a fearful blow on the head with a light-

wood knot, crushing his skull. His head fell forward and Red Shirt cut the reins with which he was tied and spread the piece of spotted cloth on the ground. De Quina turned away.

"By Gar, you mek me sick!" he said.

After removing all the valuables, they took the body and, carrying it farther into the swamp, cast it into a mud-hole that was covered with a purple scum. They watched it slowly sink, the face being the last to go down. There were a few bubbles and then the broken scum gathered back. Red Shirt found a spring and washed his hands.

"How 'bout de hawse an' buggy?" he asked, as he rose to his feet.

"I dunno," replied De Quina.

"I fix dat," said Red Shirt after a moment. "Us be bes' mek de *whoof*."

So they drove into the swamp as far as possible, unhitched the horse and, gathering pine straw and trash, piled them about the vehicle until it was concealed. Red Shirt whittled up a few resinous pieces of pine and they then set fire to the pile. It burned slowly for some moments and then sprang up into a fierce blaze. They stood watching it until it was entirely consumed. They then led the horse to a bog and when they had urged the plunging animal in, De Quina shot it through the head with the rifle. It sprang high in the air and, floundering about, fell on its side and expired.

"Dat be big shame," muttered Red Shirt, as they turned away. "Dat hawse be wu'th hundred an' fifty dollar."

They spent the day hiding in the woods and drying the blood-soaked banner. Red Shirt also gathered straw and covered the pile of ashes that lay where the buggy had been burned. Every vestige of the crime was obliterated and, when evening came on, they returned to Granville, secure in the belief that they were perfectly safe and that no one knew of their deed.

When they drove up to the preacher's house, they found the door closed. They put up the horse, and Red Shirt went to the door and knocked. After a moment, he heard a rustling noise and then the preacher's voice called thick and heavy:

"Who is there?"

"Dis am Leop," was the reply.

In a few moments some one fumbled at the door and it was then opened and Red Shirt stalked in. The preacher staggered from him and fell upon the bed.

"Whut be de matter?" asked Red Shirt.

"Sick," was the reply.

The negro sniffed for a moment.

"Sick!" he exclaimed. "By Gar, you be drunk."

De Quina now entered and they closed the door and lighted a lamp.

"What did you do with Mr. Oliver?" asked Aaron Green, as he lay stretched on his back on the bed, fully dressed.

"Dat man now be in Knowledge Town," said Red Shirt, after he had taken a drink from the bottle he found on the mantel. "His good healt', hit be very fine; I mek you t'ank. He now wear de golden slipper an' play hell wid de golden harp."

The preacher was silent.

"Yare, he done be sleep in Jesis," added the black man with a laugh, as he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

The preacher lay for some moments staring vaguely at the ceiling. Then he rolled over and lay on his face,

"I'm sick," he said with a shudder.



## CHAPTER XXVI

### DIDEMA BRINGS THE WARNING

Work was progressing rapidly on the railroad which was to extend from a railroad point northwest of Granville on through to the Gulf of Mexico. It was to pass immediately in front of the mill and to proceed within a quarter of a mile of the Granville bridge. Mr. Oliver was to go east a week later to look after the placing of an order for a heavy shipment of rails. Martin daily expected a letter from Montgomery, stating that he had given up the plan of employing convicts and had gone on to attend to matters connected with the road, but he had not received a single line, though Mr. Oliver had now been gone a week.

He was sitting on the veranda one evening after supper, talking with Arthur Hamilton, a young North Carolinian, whose duties as civil engineer had brought him along the proposed line of the road. He had stopped over for the night at the company offices. Hamilton had passed the mill property frequently during recent months, and the two young men had grown to like each other. After the first survey, Mr. Oliver had bought property for the company all along the route and, as these purchases had been made after consulting with Hamilton, and the latter's surveys had

been made after consulting with both Martin and Mr. Oliver, their business relations had brought them into rather close touch with one another. Martin had on a previous occasion confided to the young man the fact that he had sent in his resignation. Hamilton had simply stared a moment and then smiled.

"They won't accept it," he had said.

Now they were sitting quietly smoking, when Martin suddenly exclaimed:

"I got my resignation in all right, Hamilton. I found Mr. Oliver had pigeon-holed it for some time, but at last it was sent in. Father took the news all right, though I think mother had a good deal to do with it. She never did want me to come South, anyway, and has written me she is glad that I have resigned. I can't get away before January, but it makes me feel good to think that I can go then. I shall hate to leave Mr. Oliver, but I am tired of this country and want to get out of it."

Hamilton sat with his elbow on the arm of his chair, puffing at his pipe in silence.

"What do you think of it?" queried Martin. "Don't you think I am right?"

"Don't ask me," was the reply.

"Why not?"

"Well," he said slowly, "I don't know you well enough to venture an opinion. A man sometimes has things to govern his actions that other people know nothing of, and it is impossible to judge impartially. I somehow can't get at your point of vision and so I can't tell what your landscape looks like. You may be seeing mirages or nightmares, for all I know."

if they are encouraged in this by you people here, you will, as I say, be able to lift them and make the relations between the races more friendly and more kindly."

Hamilton turned toward him with a serious face.

"Wentworth," he said, "you are going back North and I want to tell you a few things. I want to tell you here just heart to heart what the true Southern idea in regard to the negro and the negro problem is. We have people who write for Southern papers and for Northern magazines, but, in nearly every instance, they sing to suit the audience. They don't tell the truth.

"In the first place, as you know, the old relationship between the whites and the blacks has utterly passed away. There are few of the old-time negroes left, and the families that once owned them are too scattered and generally too reduced in circumstances to take care of them.

"The negro is the mudsill of the social and industrial South to-day. Upon his labor in the field, in the forest and in the mine, the whole structure rests. Slip the mudsill out and the system must be reorganized, but the negro will not be the beneficiary of the change. Educate him and he quits the field. Instruct him in the trades and sciences and he enters into active competition with the white man in what are called the higher planes of life. That competition brings on friction, and that friction, in the end, means the negro's undoing.

"We can not deal with a problem like this as we would with a problem between two men. It is simply

a conflict of two races that can not mingle, and, where they conflict, one must give way. Sermons may be preached, books may be written, statutes may be passed and politicians may, for momentary advantage, turn the current of the stream, but the end of it all is as certain as Judgment Day.

“If you and I have a quarrel and I kill you, it is probably murder. If two nations war and I am on one side and you are on the other, and I jab my bayonet through your body or I blow up the vessel you are on, it is glory. If I steal your land, I am a thief. Our ancestors stole this whole continent from a people that had done them no wrong; they shot down men of the stone age who had met them with friendship and with childish wonder, and we call them pioneers and write their names large on the pages of our history. Civilized Europe is to-day builded upon the homes of mighty races that are gone, any one of which was better than the negro race to-day. Why this passing away of mighty peoples? Why the steady progress and advance of others? Is it the hand of God? Is it the hand of man? What is it? It is the grinding of the mill-stones, and the harder and the stronger will outlast. That is all. Swing the one above the other so that they do not grind together and all will be well; but if they conflict in their progress, then at the point of contact the black man will be worn away. There is no question of Christianity in it; there is no question of man’s humanity or man’s inhumanity to man in it. It is history; it is the story of the world. If God did not mean it so, then His plan of the world has sadly miscarried. Races that once peopled great portions of the earth

have utterly passed away. Their lands are occupied by others or lie desolate. Ur of the Chaldeans tells it and the ruins of the Incas stamp it truth. Kismet! It is fate.

“Every white man that lifts a negro high, slaps the white race in the face. It may be long delayed, but he leaves to his children’s children a heritage of woe.

“A man in Massachusetts, we will say, writes a strong pamphlet on the negro question. It sounds well, it looks reasonable, and he cites a passage from the Scriptures, and his friends say it is well done. Ask him who once owned the hillside where the bones of his father and mother lie, and he must tell you that some Indian tribe, now long since departed from the earth, ruled and lived there. His people stole it or, shall we say, conquered it. What is the difference?

“Now then, to the point of my argument. This is the white man’s country by right of discovery, by right of purchase, by right of conquest and by right of theft. As we took it, so will we hold it. As we governed it in the past, so we will govern it in the future. As we swept away a mighty people to secure it, so, if necessary, we will sweep away this other spawn of the jungle to hold it. We will not mix and the product of the ages will not be their mudsill.

“Leave the negro to his corn-field, to his cotton-field and his old-time happy songs, and for years all will be well. Educate him, lift him, as you say, and not only here in the South, but in the North, in the West, and in the East, the upper and the nether millstones will grind.

“The two races are separate and apart. God

stamped them so, and neither mankind nor politics can change it.

"There is an onward march of man to something. Whether it be to his damnation or to his perfection, God alone knows. No mongrel race can surpass, and these two races will not mingle into one. Force them into competition, into collision, and the black man will reel from the strife, broken and lost.

"Here in the South we deal no more with the question as between personages. Between the two races we will not tolerate the least suggestion of social equality. The man that teaches it or preaches it is an enemy to both blacks and whites. He is sowing the seeds of strife. This is for our preservation and it is our racial defense. We say we will rule. That is our racial resolve. We are keeping the millstones apart.

"These remarks, on my part, if considered worth while, might be made the subject of sneers and caustic comments on the part, let us say, of some eminently respectable newspaper man in some peaceful little village in Illinois.

"Take that little village in Illinois. The negroes that dwell there are respected. They are elected to office; they have influence among the whites; they were taught in the same schools and they attend the same churches with the whites. There is not one cloud in the social sky, and there is no toleration whatever for the narrow, un-Christianlike views of the South.

"Suddenly there is an affray between two men. A white man is shot down on the village square by some black man, and inside of an hour that peaceful little

village is a roaring hell. The homes of the negroes are burned, and they are killed as they flee from the people that loved them so.

"Why is this? You can not deny that these things occur. Are these people by nature so brutish and murderous? I think not. It is simply racial cohesion and is born of the ages. It is the grinding of the millstones that brings it about.

"Though he may not know it, this thing is in the blood of the minister's son in Maine; it is reflected in the eyes of the sweet-faced Sister of Charity who, with thumping heart, hurries through the darkening and lonely places as night settles down on New Orleans.

"We do not do things that way in the South. We do not visit upon a community punishment for the sins of one man. We hold the rein tight always. We watch; we are careful. We know the situation, and we never lull ourselves to a toleration of open violations of those rules in which experience has taught us lies our safety.

"But there is an insidious thing creeping in among us. There is a so-called charity of thought along certain lines that means great danger in the future. They are giving us, year after year, the negro with the white man's learning, but down in his inner nature, there lies the black man's heart. The racial cohesion is there, too. They are sowing the wind, the gentle breezes of springtime, but some day they will reap the whirlwind. They are shaping a creature that will call them to account. And how will they answer? There is the cohesion of the races; that is answer enough; but it might have been avoided.

"A Hayti or a San Domingo might be established for those of the other race that have ambition to rise up and do things. Give them a parade ground and let them have their revolutions there; but here at home, let us have peace; let us keep the millstones apart."

Martin turned toward Hamilton and said in a low quiet tone:

"You are a bit brutal, but perhaps you are right, in a way. There is nothing so terrible about the race, however. They are not any worse than the whites would be, considering their opportunities." He turned again and gazed through the darkness down the road toward Granville.

"I wonder why Mr. Oliver doesn't either come back or write to me," he said.

Over in Deer Creek swamp the purple scum that shines in the sunlight with the colors of a rainbow had closed again in an unbroken layer over the body of Richard Oliver, whose resting place would never be known to his friends or relatives. They would only know in the days to come that he had been done to death somewhere and somehow. In the spring, rank things would grow on the margin of the mud-hole and noisome reptiles would swim about in its thick, slimy waters. Heavy-scented flowers would perfume the air and tangles of vines would sway and swing above him, but Richard Oliver had gone from the world with a gurgling cry in his throat because, as the preacher said, with his fingers laced about the Bible: "L is liberty; L is light; L is love."

Martin continued to gaze down the road.



"If he doesn't come to-morrow," he said in a strange voice, "I'll send a negro to Pendleton with a telegram. I am getting worried about him, for he ought to have written. His horse hasn't even been sent back."

A fear suddenly stole into Martin's heart, but of what he did not know.

"Let's go inside, Hamilton," he said; "it's chilly out here. I have a strange feeling. I don't know just how to describe it, but I feel as though something terrible had happened or were about to happen."

"Malaria," said Hamilton. "I know the symptoms. If you'll just let me get to my satchel, I'll knock the chill off of you in a moment. I have some stuff that is positively ancient."

So they went up stairs, where Martin applied a match to some pine knots and in a few moments they had a roaring blaze. Hamilton opened his satchel, they poured the drinks and the Southerner held his glass high.

"Wentworth," he said, "here's good luck to you, wherever you may go—

"May the pleasures of Life all abide with you;  
May God, in His mercy, provide for you;  
With Love and with Laughter to ride with you,  
Go joyously, day by day!

This World's but a breadth and a span, my boy;  
The Lord only knoweth its plan, my boy;  
Here's the heart of a man to a man, my boy,—  
God bless you and keep you alway."

"Where did you get it?" asked Martin with some surprise. "I never heard it before."

"Oh, I dug it up," said Hamilton. "I scribble a bit sometimes. Come on," he continued, "crook elbows!"

"No!" exclaimed Martin. "Wait a moment! I have been thinking about what I said out on the veranda,—let's forget it. I want to say again that I am a white man and you are a white man and we'll let the nigger slide. You fellows down here in the South are a fine lot." Martin's face flushed and his voice fell. "I want to toast the South and the Southerners. I am going away; I am going home."

He raised his glass, but just as he did so, the door down stairs was thrown quickly open and was as quickly closed. They heard a few hurried steps in the lower hall and then some one called. It was the voice of a woman, a negress.

"Mr. Wentwuth! Oh, Mr. Wentwuth! Fer Gawd's sake, whar is yer? Come quick!"

There was a note of terror in the voice that startled them both. Martin put his glass down, stepped quickly to the door and opened it.

"Who are you and what do you want?" he called.

"Hit's Dema de Quina. Hit's de Traylors' Dema," was the terrified reply.

"Come up!" he answered. "What is the matter with you?" Didema staggered breathlessly up the stairs. She had evidently been running, for she was panting from exhaustion. Her face was ashy and her eyes were wild with fear.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Hamilton, staring at her, as she clung to the door for support.

Didema made no reply, but staggered to a chair and dropped into it with a sobbing cry.

"Oh, Lawdy mussy! Oh, Lawdy mussy! Oh, me! Oh, my Lawdy!" she moaned, her face buried in her hands and her body swaying from side to side.

"What in thunder is the matter with you?" cried Martin. "Tell me!"

"Here! Give her some whisky!" said Hamilton, handing him the glass from which he had been about to drink a few moments before.

Didema took the glass with eager, shaking fingers and swallowed the liquor down at one gulp. She took a swallow of water and then relapsed once more to the sobbing and wailing.

"Look here, Didema!" cried Martin. "If there is anything the matter with you, why, say so!"

Didema raised her head, showing frightened, rolling eyes; then she waved her arms helplessly for a moment.

"De niggers," she panted.

"Well, what about the niggers?" asked Martin.

"De niggers gwineter kill all de white folks an' me, too!" she exclaimed brokenly.

Martin laughed, but there was an uncertainty about the tone.

"Oh, get out!" he cried. "You are crazy!"

Didema seemed suddenly to compose herself. She stood up and held both her trembling hands toward Heaven.

"I hopes ter Gawd dat He gwineter strack me daid ef dat nigger s'iety at de pole-house chutch ain't got 'bout er hunderd niggers er-crossin' de ribber wid guns dis bery minute. Dey gwineter start wid de Traylors an' atter dey kills all dem an' gits de money

whut's hid, den dey gwineter come on back ter Granville an' des natchelly kill evvybody."

She dropped into her chair and, covering her face, began once more to sob and moan.

"Oh, my young mistis! Oh, my putty young mistis! Dey gwineter marry dat sweet angel wid some nasty nigger an' den she gwineter commit herse'f ter deff. Oh, Lawdy! Oh, mer Jesis! An' dey ain't no hope!"

A sudden terror seized Martin's heart. He felt for a moment as though he would choke and a wild light came into his eyes. He caught the negress roughly by the arm and shook her.

"Here!" he exclaimed fiercely. "What is this you are telling me?"

Didema dropped on her knees before him and held out her hands beseechingly.

"Cap'n," she cried piteously; "hit's de Gawd's trufe. My man Lope and de Spanish nigger and Pahson Green is de leaders, an' dey gwineter kill me, too. I waded de creek an' I been hid on de islan' listenin'. Oh, Lawsy mussy! Please, Marster, save me, fer Gawd's sake, an' doan' let dem niggers git me."

Martin ran wildly out of the room; he hardly knew what he was doing.

"Hit's de risin' uv de niggers," were the last words he heard from Didema, as he stumbled down the stairway. He leaped from the gallery to the ground, vaulted the fence and ran down toward the river. There he strode up and down in a frenzied way, peering through the darkness up toward the island, but no lights were visible. Suddenly something floating by on the water caught his attention. It was a stick of timber from the

Willow Creek pond. He watched it as it passed quickly by and then another came. Some one was evidently running logs from the pond down Willow Creek and these had escaped. It had taken them some time to float down.

"It's true!" he cried. "Great God! It's too true!"

He turned quickly and, running back to the house, stumbled up the stairs where he found Hamilton hunting for weapons. He had found a breech-loader.

"It's true, Hamilton!" he cried. "We must go!"

"What have you got to fight with?" asked Hamilton. "I find a gun, but no ammunition."

"Oh, guns, cartridges, pistols and knives," he almost shouted. "Come on, man! Good Lord! Come on!"

"Get the stuff out, you idiot!" exclaimed Hamilton. "You dance about as though you had a bee in your shirt."

Martin ran to a closet and dragged out two repeating shot-guns. He also took out a pair of revolvers of heavy caliber. Snatching open a bureau drawer, he pulled out another pair of revolvers of the same caliber as the first.

"Put up that breech-loader," he cried to Hamilton. "These are what we want."

"Are they loaded? Have you got shells for them? Talk sense to me and don't act like a crazy man."

"Yes, there are a hundred shells loaded with buck-shot," shouted Martin.

Hamilton grabbed him and shook him.

"Here! Get your brains straight, Wentworth!" he cried. "I'll saddle the horses. You get up the ammunition."

Martin fell to work and became calmer, but all the while Didema continued to moan and to pray.

Suddenly he turned upon her. His face was very pale and his knees were weak and trembling.

"Do you swear you told the truth?" he cried in as stern a voice as he could muster.

"Does I look lak I is er lyin'?" she exclaimed brokenly. "Look at mer close, whar I got wet in de creek. Look at um whar I wuz er-runnin' an' fell down erbout fo'teen time. Oh, Lawdy! Des look at me! Des look at me er-cryin' fit ter die! Do dat look lak put on?" Here her head dropped. "Oh, my Jesis! I wisht I wuz daid," she moaned. "Lope gwineter kill me an' marry wid some white gal."

"Do what?" cried Martin.

"Yassuh, he sho is. He gwineter marry wid some white gal, an' all de balance uv de niggers is gwineter do dat. I heard him er-tellin' one uv de niggers dat me an' him ain't married nohow. He 'low dat us neber had no lison."

"No what?"

"No lison. No writin' f'um de jedge."

"How are the negroes crossing the river?" he asked.

"Dey is been er-runnin' lawg's ouden de pawn. Dey got er mawl an' some chains an' been er-spikin' de en's tergedder so ez ter mek er floatin' bridge."

"We will go and kill the devils!" he cried.

"Naw, suh, Cap'n, fer Gawd's sake, doan' try dat. Dey'll kill yer sho. Dey is all got rifles an' guns an' dey is all erbout drunk, an' I reckon dey mus' done be crosst de ribber by dis time, anyhow, an' gwine on thu de fiel' ter kill my young mistis. Oh, Lawdy! Lawdy!"

Didema slipped from her chair and groveled about the floor in an agony of grief and fear.

"How did you come to be there?" he asked of the miserable, bedraggled, heartbroken woman who lay prostrated in her despair.

"I follered Lope, unbeknowens ter him," she sobbed. "He ain't been er-stayin' at home none sence de s'iety started good, an' he been beatin' me reg'lar, too. I 'lowed dat maybe hit mout be some 'oman, an' so I follered him fer ter fin' out, an' dat's how come I in dis neighborhood."

At this moment Hamilton came rushing up the stairs.

"I've got the horses," he cried, "and it is a fact. They have let the water out of the pond and the river is running heavy. I went down to it."

Martin seized his gun and swung the hunting-bag over his shoulder.

"There's yours and a pair of pistols and the cartridges and shells," he cried.

Hamilton gathered up his weapons and ammunition and they hurried down the stairs. The horses were loosely fastened at the gate and they quickly mounted.

"We will rouse Granville and then hurry on to the Traylor plantation," said Martin. "Suppose you stop at Granville and I'll go right ahead."

He turned Alabama and started to ride away, when he felt Didema tugging at his stirrup and her agonized cry came to him.

"Please, suh, doan' leab me behin'. Fer Jesis' sake, le' me go 'long, too," she moaned, hanging on with the

strength of despair. "De niggers gwineter kill me sho."

Martin pulled on his rein and, reaching down, caught the negress by the arm. "Put your foot on mine!" he commanded. She did as she was bidden and he swung the sobbing, frightened creature up behind him. Alabama had never before carried double and tried to throw them.

"Hang on!" he cried, and dug his heels into the mare's sides. With a snort of fear, she sprang forward, and they raced down the sandy road with the speed of the wind. He could feel Didema as she flopped up and down and from side to side and felt sorry for her. Once or twice she almost slipped off, but he had his gun to hold and could help her but little.

"Hang on!" he commanded.

"I is er-hangin'," came in broken syllables at his back.

Across the bridge they thundered, up the hill and on toward Granville. There Martin halted, and Hamilton, riding up at a gallop, also drew rein.

"We must get Tiffin," cried Hamilton. "He is a good man and can fight all right and we can get him quicker than any one else." They were just in front of the store of Anderson and Tiffin, and Martin commanded Didema to slip off the horse and go and rouse Tiffin. This she did, and in a very few moments he had explained the situation to him.

"Good Lord!" he cried. "They are utterly helpless out there. Mr. Traylor broke his leg yesterday. I took Jess out there this evening to spend the night."

"De niggers is atter Mr. Traylor's buried money,"



cried Didema through chattering teeth. "Dey is gittin' dat fer er nes' aig fer ter hatch out er nigger country."

Tiffin ran hurriedly to his room over the store and scribbled a note which, on returning, he gave to Didema, commanding her to take it to Captain Brantley with all possible speed.

"You two go on!" he cried. "I'll follow you as soon as I can get things started here." He took out his keys and opened the store door, and, after he had lighted a lamp, they saw him hurry to the place where the guns and ammunition were kept.

They whirled their horses and, with the pressure of Martin's heels in her sides, Alabama sprang forward and caught her stride. Hamilton's horse thundered along, keeping pace with the speedier mare as best he could.

It was unfortunate for their speed that the road was heavy with sand, but it was also fortunate in that they made little noise, except when they clattered across a bit of wind-swept ground. Suddenly some one gave a warning call somewhere ahead of them.

"Heh! Whoa, there! What in thunder are you trying to run over me for?"

Martin tried to pull in his mare and also to get his gun in readiness should it be necessary to make use of it. He found it was all that he could do to stop Alabama.

"Get out of the road!" he called.

"Oh, I guess not," was the reply. "I don't know who you are, but I'll fill you full of shot if you try to run over me. You come and try it."

"Who are you?" called Martin, as they drew nearer.

He could make out the dim figure of a man on horseback armed with a gun. He was occupying the middle of the road.

"I am," was the reply, "by the grace of God, the Constitution of the United States and this here shotgun of mine, named Josh Simpson, by golly! an' don't nobody run over me wuth er durn. You try it."

"Here, Simpson," called Martin, riding up quickly, "this is Martin Wentworth and Mr. Hamilton. The mill-hands are all drunk and armed and are crossing the fields to attack Mr. Traylor's, and we are going to try to hold them back until help comes from Granville."

During the hurried explanation, Martin heard two or three hiccoughs issue from Josh's lips. Josh turned his horse to go with them.

"I'm er little drunk, gentlemen," he explained. "Been huntin' er wildcat with the Johnson boys. Never found no wildcat, but dis-hic-skivered er liquor-still all right, all right. I'm with yer, right or wrong. I doan' know nothin' 'bout whut you say, but it sounds to me like facts and I'm with yer fer whut I'm worth."

The three went flying up the road, but Josh had fallen to the rear. His horse could not keep pace with the others and, besides this, he was in no condition for fast riding. He reeled in his saddle as it was. When they halted at the gate, he refused to go up to the house.

"Got too much booze on board," he explained. "I ain't fit ter meet ladies, but I'm in crackin' fine condition ter fight niggers. I'll sidle roun' through th' yard an' hold 'em off if they come before you get ready."

He staggered round through the yard and, while Martin was ringing the bell to alarm the household, Hamilton stood at the foot of the steps. At this moment, Tiffin rode furiously up and, springing from his horse, hurried through the gate and came up the walk on a run, wearing a shooting-coat, the pockets of which were bulging with loaded shells. Two heavy pistols were strapped on him and he had in his hands a repeating shot-gun. On any other occasion he would have appeared ridiculous, as he was fairly weighted down with arms and ammunition.

A rain-barrel was standing at the corner of the house. It was used to catch water for watering the flower garden and Josh's eye lighted on it at once. He leaned his gun against the house and, tilting the barrel, soused his head into the water two or three times, drawing it out at last with a shuddering exclamation. He wrung the water from his hair with his hands, wiped his face with his handkerchief and then stood erect.

"Now, by the great horn spoon," he cried, "I'm ready!"

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE UPRISING

A few minutes after Martin rang the door-bell, young Doctor Mitchell appeared at the door and the situation was quickly explained to him.

A few seconds later, Walter mounted the steps hurriedly. "There will be plenty of men here directly," he said. "Mr. Anderson is at the store supplying them with ammunition and we have given out what weapons we had. They are back at the store now and some boys are taking light loads out of shells and putting in buck-shot. We four will go back to the old Jackson Road and try to hold them off until reinforcements come. There is a dance at the Winwoods' to-night and about ten boys from the country are there. They will all be along just as soon as they can get in shape and we must keep the negroes back from the house until they come."

The Jackson Road was simply a shallow gully running through the Traylor plantation and continuing on toward the southwest. It was said to be the road along which General Jackson led his army on the historical march to New Orleans, where he afterward met and defeated the British under Pakenham. The road had not been used for a great many years and

had grown up with sassafras and sweet-gum bushes, making an admirable place for the concealment and protection of a firing line against an enemy approaching from the southeast. The four young men, who soon entered it and settled down to wait, knew that in a rush they could not hold it for more than a few moments against the band of negroes now on the march. Concealed almost to their shoulders, they waited for the approach of the enemy. They did not have long to wait. The sound of many feet came to them, together with the subdued murmur of many voices. The negroes were approaching rapidly on their way to the Traylor home. In a few moments they were very near, and Walter suddenly called in a loud voice: "Halt! Who comes here?"

Instantly there was the confused sound as of men jumbled together in the darkness. The first four had halted and the others, following, butted into them and the whole command was soon in a tangle. The men in the gully heard strange oaths and recognized the voice of De Quina, the commanding officer, who was striving to straighten out things. There was a murmur of voices and then, before them in the dim light, there deployed a line which they judged must contain a hundred men.

There came a strange command and the line began to move quickly forward when one of the negroes, possibly more nervous than the rest, fired his rifle toward the gully. The leader of the attacking party uttered a loud oath and the line hurried forward. Instantly Walter gave the command to fire and to continue firing as rapidly as possible, shifting the fire to

every part of the dark line so that demoralization might be in every place. The four shot-guns roared out upon the still night air almost simultaneously, and the reports were followed by loud yells of pain among the negroes. There came a return volley that was almost as a sheet of flame, but many of the shots went too high. The men were bespattered with dirt, twigs struck them in the face, and Josh Simpson was heard to groan and then to swear softly between his teeth.

As fast as shells could be thrown into the repeating shot-guns, these were emptied in the direction of the negroes.

"Fire low and shift your position after firing," directed Walter. "Don't waste a single shell." Some one staggered against Martin,—it was Josh.

"Give me a revolver!" he said. "My gun was a muzzle-loader. My right arm is gone up and I can't use the thing any more." Martin handed him the weapon and continued to fire his gun while Josh stood blazing away with the revolver.

The firing on the part of the negroes had now become fast and furious. Leaves were torn from the bushes and the bullets sang as thick as bees. Martin felt the breath of one against his cheek, but was not struck. Suddenly Josh stumbled backward and coughed. A gurgling curse broke from his lips and, seizing Martin's other revolver, he staggered up the side of the gully and proceeded toward the negroes, firing deliberately.

"The fool is gone!" cried Walter, as fully twenty rifles blazed away at one time. "We had better get out of this and fall back, They will rush us in a moment.

There is a pile of logs just about fifty yards up the gully, and we can get behind it and, when they rush in here, we can sweep the gully and play hell with them."

"Take my gun and reload it!" cried Martin. He handed it to Walter and, hastily filling the chambers of the revolver Josh had left, he ran quickly up the side of the bank and, stooping low, sped through a storm of bullets to where the moonshiner's son had fallen. He raised the youth in his arms and returned toward the gully on a run. Not a bullet touched him, but he felt Josh's leg fly round and heard the *pat* of the bullet as it plowed through.

"Makes four," gurgled Josh, as they stumbled into the gully.

Walter and young Hamilton kept up the fire and the bullets from their pump-guns were equal in effect to the fire of a dozen or more rifles. Martin took up his gun and emptied it in the direction of the negroes. They, unused to standing under fire, had broken line and were huddled together in groups. Among these, the execution was great and the whole attacking force was soon lying prone upon the ground to escape the storm of buckshot that swept around and above them. The white men in the ditch could again hear the strange commands and knew the negroes were preparing for a rush.

"Let's get out of this," urged Hamilton. "We couldn't hold it for a second and there certainly must be reinforcements coming in at the house by this time."

After a last thundering volley, they filed up the

rough sunken road toward the public highway. At last, after going some two hundred yards, they emerged from the gully and cut across the open toward the house. Martin, being the largest and strongest of the party, carried Josh in his arms. The boy's arm was badly shattered and at every swing of his body it gave him intense pain. He had been shot twice in the right leg, and one bullet had pierced his right lung. As Martin stumbled along through the darkness, he could hear the bubbling wheeze as Josh labored for breath.

- When they reached the house, they found a dozen men had just arrived, and these were quickly reinforced by four or five more. They were scattered out on the side of the house nearest the Jackson Road behind such protection as they could find, and men were sent forward to report on the position and movements of the negroes. Some one, who was poorly armed, took Martin's gun from Hamilton, but he still retained his two revolvers and his supply of cartridges. Martin entered the house and deposited Josh on a bed, leaving him in charge of Doctor Mitchell. Captain Brantley came into the room and stood for a moment. Josh motioned to him and, after gasping out a few words, fell back on the pillow. He was gone.

"This is no time for the expression of regrets," exclaimed Captain Brantley to Martin. "I have taken command of things and you and Walter must stay here and guard the house and take care of the women and such wounded as we may have. You can fire from the windows if it becomes absolutely necessary, but be sure you do not shoot your own men." After extin-



guishing the lights, the captain hurried out to arrange his plans of defense.

Martin took his station at the east window of the front room. The two girls and Mr. and Mrs. Traylor were just across the hall and he felt this was the most important place to be protected. Walter was somewhere in the back of the house. There was a great pile of fire-wood in the back yard and the men carried these heavy oaken sticks and, stacking them up waist high at some distance from the house, gathered behind the rude breastworks and waited.

No further firing now came from the direction of the Jackson Road and, as Martin stood at the window and looked out into the night, he knew that the negroes had discovered they had fled from the gully and were now advancing. Those who had been sent forward to watch soon returned with definite information, and they had but a few minutes to wait. There was a chorus of yells on the part of the attacking party and, after delivering several spattering volleys, the negroes attempted to sweep everything before them with one rush. They were met by a fire that drove them back, and yells, howls and curses were mixed with the stern calls from Captain Brantley to "shoot to hit and to keep on blazing away." He was holding his men back and would not let them leave protection and fight in the open, for he desired to win with as little loss as possible, and meant to let the negroes batter against him as long as they would do so. These people were all his friends and neighbors and the death of any one of them would cause much sorrow.

De Quina at last appeared to believe that he could not rush the place, and his men began to creep up through the darkness, firing their Winchesters and then dropping flat on the ground. A party of them tried to approach the house from the direction of the negro cabins that lay toward the north, but John White was stationed there with a small party and, with one volley, wiped out the whole band. Bullets began to plow through the house. One came through the window with a *zut*, and Martin heard a picture fall with a crash somewhere behind him, the cord that held it having been cut. Everything outside was a succession of *pop* and *boom*. Blankets of smoke drifted through the window and the firing on the house grew hotter.

How hard it was for him to wait, kneeling there by the window! He held a loaded revolver in either hand and was yet able to do nothing. What a relief it would be if he could only blaze away at something,—nothing. The smell of the smoke stirred his blood and he was going through with what is so hard for recruits to learn to do,—stand patiently under fire without replying.

“Oh, I wish I could get just one pop at them!” he exclaimed.

Suddenly he felt there was some one standing behind him and, turning quickly, he rose to his feet. He caught her by the arm. “For God’s sake, get behind the chimney!” he cried. “The bullets from those rifles go through these walls as though they were made of paper.”

“I know it,” replied Virginia in a quiet voice. “Two

have already gone through our room. I want one of your revolvers."

"Go back," he cried. "What do you want with it?" He saw that her face was deathly pale, but she was quiet and collected.

"I want it to shoot mother and Jessica and myself with if those black fiends break in," she said.

The cold sweat of horror started from every pore of his body.

"For the love of the Lord, get behind the chimney!" he cried. "They will kill you if you stand here. Our men are driving them back and they won't get to the house."

"Give me the pistol!" she said.

He handed her one of them.

"Go!" he cried, and turned quickly again to the window.

Suddenly there was a sharp pain as of a stitch in his side and he heard a chair fall somewhere near the door. The bullet had gone through. He doubled forward and staggered.

"You are hit!" she cried.

By an effort he straightened himself, and though his sight swam, he turned toward her with a hoarse laugh.

"I am not," he said. "I have not been touched. You go on back to your room!"

"Get behind the window-facing!" she directed.

He thrust the revolver into his pocket and, whirling, caught her by the shoulders and endeavored to push her from the room. The firing outside was redoubled and suddenly there came a roar heavier than



“I want it if those black fiends break in,” she said

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any explosion that had yet taken place. A chorus of yells followed it.

"Go!" cried Martin. "I beg you to go!" His teeth chattered with fear for her and when his hands were on her shoulders a madness seized him. Swinging her round, he caught her in his arms, and crushing her to him, kissed her on the mouth.

"I love you! Oh, I love you!" he cried.

Virginia broke from him with a sob and, stepping forward, struck him a blow on the face with her open hand.

"You coward!" she cried. "You miserable, cowardly villain!"

He lurched from her in silence and somehow felt she had left the room. He hung against the window-facing and, thrusting his pistol through the opening, spit its contents into the darkness. A shame was upon him; every mark of her fingers on his face seemed branded with fire and he felt that he had fallen and was lost.

A peculiar joy now came to him from the pain in his wound. He hoped, as he stood at the window, that some one would shoot him through the heart, but he knew in a dreamy way that the fight was over and the negroes had fled. He could hear the sound of guns in the distance as the white men followed cautiously after them, and he could also hear the return fire. De Quina was holding his defeated force remarkably well in hand and the darkness was much in his favor.

Martin staggered out through the doorway into the hall and, stuffing his handkerchief into the wound in his side, went out on the porch. Torches had been

lighted in the yard and he heard men say that old Ephraim had crept in behind the negroes and had killed Red Shirt, who was dressed in a wonderful spotted garb and wore a crown on his head. He heard, too, that the gun had exploded and the old servant had been injured.

Staggering up to a group, he saw a young man loading a repeating shot-gun. He recognized it as his own by the silver plate on the stock, and took possession both of the gun and of the sack of shells. The thought came to him that the negroes would return to the mill and burn it. What could he ask of these people who were about him? Nothing. He was an alien, a Yankee who had just insulted a Southern girl, and any man in the crowd would put a load of buck-shot in him at the turn of her hand. Bareheaded and white-faced he went out through the gate and found Alabama where he had fastened her. She was one of the few horses that had not broken loose at the sound of the firing, but she was trembling like a frightened hare. He untied her and, with an effort, gained the saddle. Some one called to him and asked where he was going.

"To the mill," he replied.

At the first touch in her side, Alabama made a wild spring and they were off like the wind. Clinging to his weapon, he heard the clatter of her feet as she raced toward Granville. He heard people shout to him from in front and also from the side of the road. He did not try to avoid them, but Alabama managed it somehow and no one was trampled under foot. He only knew he was ramming his heels into

her sides and that they were going, going, going! At last he could hear the sob in her breath and, grinding his teeth, he drove her harder and harder and she responded until the last strain was reached. Her eyes protruded and the veins stood out on her like whipcords, but he could not see them; and had he seen them, he would not have cared. This was the man who had loved her and cared for her; who petted her and fed her sugar, who had put his arms about her neck and whispered strange things in her ears—and now he was driving her cruelly. The sweat was pouring from her and the limit of her speed had long since been reached, but he rammed her in the sides and drove her and drove her until patches came before her eyes and she strained on through darkness.

Martin realized at last that he was thundering across the bridge; then, after a bit, there came the turn to the mill; but he went by the offices without drawing rein and urged the faltering mare again and again as they sped on toward the island. He felt he was going to his death on this wild ride and was glad of it. At last he saw something rise before him,—possibly a lumber pile, he did not know. There was a crash and they went down and down and he heard the mare groan. A gun fired as he fell; perhaps it was his own, perhaps another's. He was not certain, but he seemed to feel the jar. Now he was on foot and staggering along,—Alabama had been left behind. Dark figures were hurrying from the water's edge. He saw them and went to meet them. At every one of them he fired and when his gun was empty, he managed somehow to reload it. There was something that looked



like a path across the river; it was the improvised bridge and figures were on it, crossing toward him. He swept them from it with buck-shot. Some of them leaped into the water and here and there in the thicket, across the river, there were quick spurts of flame, and bullets hummed about him. Twice something struck him, leaving a numb and deadened spot, and he fell forward and felt that his face was against the ground and that there was sand in his mouth. He spit it out and, dragging his gun to his side, sat there and fired again and again into the woods on the other side. At last he tried to rise, but could not do so. His gun would fire no more.

He lay back on the ground and far up above him in the black sky, there came a weak illumination. He saw strange patterns in many shades; patterns of wall-paper they seemed to be, and they changed and shifted continually. The light flickered again and again, darkness fell about him and he went to sleep, feeling as though he were rushing along through the night in a roaring, unlighted train. It jumbled and rumbled at last and then came to a stop. He heard the voices of train-hands and then he seemed to hear Walter's voice. There were lanterns about him and it seemed that they were taking him from the car. They were carrying him somewhere. "My station," he murmured. "At home."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### IN THE NIGHT

"My Lord! are you hurt?" asked Walter as he walked into the room where lamps had just been lighted.

Virginia was still holding in her hand the big revolver that she had got from Martin, and her face was very pale.

"Hurt—how?" she asked.

"Why, look at your dress! There's blood on the skirt from the waist down."

She gazed at it with an exclamation of horror. Suddenly a wild look came into her face and, with a stifled cry, she seized a lamp and fled from the room. Walter followed her as she went through the hall and into the parlor. An overturned chair met their gaze, part of the back having been split off by a bullet. Her grandfather's picture lay broken on the floor, but Virginia passed on and paused near the window.

"Don't stand there with that light in your hand!" cried Walter. "The negroes have given up, but one of them may be within shooting distance and it is not safe to risk it."

She tossed the pistol on a sofa and passed her hand over her eyes.

"There," she said in a choking voice, as she pointed

to a large dark place on the carpet, near one of the windows.

He stooped and examined it and Virginia placed the lamp on a table. Her hands were trembling and her body shook as with a chill.

"It's blood!" he said. "Where is he?" Then, straightening his shoulders, he gazed into her face.

"Wentworth was wounded," he said. "Tell me what became of him!"

Virginia was unable to reply, and in that moment he read her love in the misery depicted in her face. She shook her head to indicate that she did not know, but, turning his eyes from the window to the door, he could follow the spattering track. Into the hall he went with a rush and outside she could hear him frantically calling Martin's name. She staggered to the sofa and fell on her knees before it. A great, stifling sob broke from her lips.

"And I struck him!" she cried. "I struck him when he was shot and may be dying for my sake." Then she buried her face in her arms and prayed.

"Where is Martin Wentworth?" she heard Walter calling outside.

"Gone crazy!" some one replied. "As crazy as hell! He tried to ride over everybody between here and Granville; somebody ought to have shot the fool. Said he was going to the mill."

"They is been devilish heavy frin' over thater way," said some one else. "I spec hell's ter pay over there, but if we take keer of the Granville side of the river, we'll be doin' blame well. They ain't no white folks over that side much nohow."

Then she heard Walter's voice again. It seemed he was pleading with and swearing at some of the men. Finally the voices hushed and then she heard a sharp clatter of hoofs and knew that a body of men had gone on horseback toward Granville. In a moment or two Jessica crept to the door and looked in. Virginia rose slowly from her knees, holding her dress so as to hide the blood stains.

"I was frightened and was praying," she explained.

Jessica looked at her with terrified eyes. She had been sobbing hysterically almost from the time the warning party had come. Again and again she had repeated: "Oh, Virginia! I don't want to die; I can't die; I'm not good enough to die!" Now she stood in the middle of the room, shaking.

"Where is he?" she asked in a choking voice.

In spite of herself, wrath and resentment had been gathering in Virginia's heart for some time and now that the burden of her woe was upon her, after she had given up everything for this girl and had even struck a wounded and perhaps dying man on the face at the very moment when her heart was filled with love for him, it was more than she could bear to have Jessica come and track her about the house and stare at her grief and vent her selfish cry. She turned on Jessica like a tigress and felt for a moment that she could tear her with her hands.

"Where is who?" she cried. "Where is who? You hunt him yourself if you want to be his shadow!"

Then she softened and, turning away, caught hold of the edge of the door as she felt her way blindly through.

"He is gone—to—Granville," she said brokenly, and went out. Jessica followed after her, still weeping.

Far in the distance, they could hear the church-bell at Granville ringing. People were gathering there for safety, not knowing as yet the extent of the uprising. Every male that could carry and use a weapon held one and had been stationed to guard some spot.

It was for these people, indeed, a night of terror, but the battle ended shortly after the flight of the negroes from the Traylor plantation, though many of them were shot down by pursuing parties which followed them nearly to the river. They had attempted to cross the bridge they had fashioned, but Martin had blazed into them from the opposite side and they had been forced either to plunge into the water or to take flight through the thick brush along the river bank. Still the alarm bell rang on. Those sitting in the dark and crowded church below could hear the squeak of the crank as it swung backward and forward and clang after clang rang out.

Suddenly there was a rattle and a rumbling, tumbling sound, followed by a heavy fall. The bell-crank squeaked on for a moment and the metallic hum of the bell-metal wavered and wavered and weakened and died. The clapper had broken loose and fallen, and utter silence now reigned. There was the sound of the firing of a gun; lonely and dull it boomed upon the night air. Some one rose in the darkness, mounted the pulpit and cried:

"Let us repeat the Lord's Prayer!"

They rose to their feet and, as the prayer was being

uttered, there were broken sobs in the church. Mothers hugged their children to their hearts, thanking God for their preservation, while above them all there hung the tongueless bell, mute now when its call was no longer needed.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE VENGEANCE OF SLIM SIMPSON

No one knew how the news reached Slim Simpson, for he learned it in some manner which he never explained.

He entered the little front gate at the Traylors' and walked up to an excited group standing near him among the trampled flowers and shrubbery.

"I am sorry for you, Simpson," said Captain Brantley in a low tone, as he turned toward him with sympathetic face.

Slim stared for a moment, and at last, in a strange tone and by a visible effort, he asked:

"Where is he?"

To the surprise of the group, Captain Brantley placed his arm about the man's shoulders and led him into the house where Josh lay with a smile upon his lips.

"He lived but a little while after he was brought in," said the captain. "He motioned to me to come to him and whispered to me: 'Ask daddy to forgive me, I'm sorry.' Then he said: 'I'm glad it's over,' and was gone."

Slim Simpson stood for a moment gazing down at his son with strained face, and then a shudder passed over him and he turned away in silence. Out through

the hall he strode, excited people stepping aside and gazing with curiosity at his face. Some one touched his arm, but he did not pause. He passed slowly down the steps and near the gate he stopped.

Where should he go? "Home!" The word sounded dull in his brain. Home—home—

Several men, gathered in a group near him, were talking earnestly.

"It was the preacher," said one. "Aaron Green was at the bottom of it all. One of the wounded negroes told a lot of us he would never have gone into it but for Aaron Green. He says the preacher was the brains of the whole thing and pulled them all into it and made a big speech ordering them to kill the white people. Red Shirt is dead and I guess De Quina is too, but that long devil of a preacher, the worst of the lot, was too slick to get caught. He stayed back at the church and is gone a-glimmering by this time."

"Well," said another, "we have lost but one man, that poor devil, Josh Simpson, but we ought to catch Green. We ought to advertise for him all over the country. And here we were, too," he added, "like a lot of fools, thinking that at last we had seen a straight nigger preacher. And now we find that the murdering scoundrel was at the bottom of a damnable thing like this."

Slim Simpson stood like one in a dream.

"Aaron Green," he muttered, "Aaron Green, Aaron Green, the preacher—"

He passed slowly out of the gate and walked down the road toward Granville, his heavy feet dragging through the dust at every step.



The skies were clear, and great solemn stars blinked softly in every part of the dark dome that hung above him. All the sorrows of his sad, sad life crowded thick upon him. They ranged themselves before his whirling mind, but there had been none like this—none like this. His body seemed cold and numb and his heart seemed dead.

From somewhere back, as it seemed, in the distant past, there came to him the words that some one else had spoken :

“It was Aaron Green—Aaron Green, the preacher.”

Still he plodded on, mumbling the words as though he could not understand. The Lord had been against him. From the day of his birth the Lord had been against him, was the thought that crept through his tortured brain.

The Lord—the Lord—and now through His preacher the mighty, the killing blow, had fallen.

“Aaron Green,” he muttered in a daze, “Aaron Green, the preacher.”

Suddenly he paused ; he felt there was an unseen presence near him and he gazed about on both sides of the road in fear. A cold sensation as of a wind blowing against him passed over him and he seemed to hear mysterious whisperings. About and about they went, first on one side and then on the other, nothing definite, nothing certain ; just a mumbling and a whistling sigh. Then it came to him from out of the darkness, while his very blood froze in his veins : “*Oh, Wilson, Wilson Hartley, when I die I am going to tell God on you!*”

A strangling cry broke from his lips ; his eyes were

protruding in horror and his feet shuffled about in the sandy soil as he sought to avoid something he could not see. His mouth closed with a snap and, with distended nostrils, he stood laboring for breath.

Suddenly he threw his head back and laughed loudly. Then, taking his hat from his head, he sailed it over the fence into a field. Something in his brain seemed to slip and shift and the agony and fear in his heart passed away.

Slim Simpson had gone mad, utterly and hopelessly mad. Strange noises still sounded in his ears and he now heard the ringing of mighty bells. *Boom, boom!* they came and, then rising higher, clang after clang rolled and reverberated for him throughout the world. Again they changed and peal on peal came to his ears. Chimes were sounding somewhere; beautiful silvery bells melted their melodious tones together and high in the still air rose the music,

“Nearer, my God, to Thee.”

The man staggered to a fence corner and leaned against the rails.

“Come on!” he screamed. “I mock you. I hurl your gifts back in your face.”

Suddenly all became still, and then there rose thin and high upon the air a strange and doleful sound,—the cry of something that suffered in soul, and lifted its mournful plaint to God. He listened intently and, mumbling to himself, sat down on the ground and waited. Once more it rose, quivering high, hopeless and lonely.

Finally something came and licked his hands and

face and, dimly, as through a mist, he saw his yellow hound.

"Hello!" he muttered, as he fondled the animal. "Hello, Slink!" He toyed with its ears and regarded it strangely. "Slink, slank, slunk," he said slowly. Then he rose to his feet with a shout of triumph.

"I have found it," he cried. "Oh, ye powers that killed him, I have found it! I will hunt you, O Lord, to hell and slay you!"

He dropped on his knees and caught the dog's head in his arms and kissed it.

"Come, Slink!" he cried softly. Then, struggling to his feet, he went down the road with his hands in his pockets, strange lights and shadows flitting unheeded before him. The brain of the madman held a steady purpose and that purpose guided his feet homeward.

Reaching his house, he trod through the open doorway and, taking down a shot-gun, loaded it carefully. Leaving the door swinging wide, he took his departure, casting never a glance behind. He called to Slink and the two went away from the place for ever.

Soon he found himself at the house of Aaron Green, the preacher. The door was fastened, but he broke it in with his shoulder and, entering, took up one of the negro's shoes and held it out to the dog. Slink sniffed at it, then growled low. Again he sniffed and his being seemed to change and a yelp broke from him. Down the road they went together, passing through Granville and across the bridge to the eastern side, near to where the road to the mill turned northward. Suddenly Slink put his nose to the ground and gave a cry, the cry of the scent that is surely found. The

trail led across the road and to the south and a shout of joy broke from the madman as he followed swiftly behind, calling warningly to the dog. The sounds of the chase soon ceased and Slink, his whole body shaking and trembling, noiselessly followed the trail through pine forest and swamp, across streams and through gallberry flats.

Light had fallen upon them early in the chase and now the sun was beaming down on them. Silently they traveled on until about the noon hour, when suddenly a cry broke from the dog. Simpson had held him quiet for a long time, but as the scent became fresher, quivering whimpers had escaped him from time to time. Following the cry, there was a rush by the dog and then, before them in the forest, Aaron Green stood at bay. He raised a pistol, but there came the roar of a shot-gun and the weapon flew into the air. Two fingers and a thumb on his right hand went with it and the blood spurted.

Round and round him Slink charged and bayed, but the negro hardly noticed him. The stoicism of the Indian was at that moment uppermost in him, and he stood straight and tall, with his head held high and a look of defiance on his face. He had no hope.

"Shoot and end it, you dog of a white man!" he cried. "I am not afraid."

Simpson called to his dog to be quiet, and the animal crept back to him in terror, whimpering and whining.

The madman gazed at the preacher strangely. His eyes were staring and he seemed to look through and beyond the negro. Suddenly he began to speak, and

Aaron Green started with fear and horror at his words.

"Lord Jesus," he said slowly, "Thou art about to come into Thine own. The way has been long, but the pursuit has been relentless. In the days when God spoke to His children, who had done Him no wrong save to live as He had made them, He said: *Vengeance is mine and I will repay*. The day of the Lord has passed and mine own has come. A soul was put into my boy that led him to the hell that Thy father had prepared. Last night Thy father took him and slew him through you and, as the blood burst from his body and the sweat of death grew moist upon his young forehead, then was it written again: 'The words of the Lord were lies, and unto Jared Ogletree, to Jared, the lost and the damned, shall vengeance come, vengeance deep and mighty and sweet to the soul.' On this day, Lord Jesus, Thou shalt die."

The aspect of the negro suddenly changed. He fell on his knees, his face was ashy and old and wrinkled. He held up his hands for mercy, the bleeding right hand spouting and spurting blood over his body. His very soul crawled and writhed within him, and he howled with fear, his cries sounding like those of some yelping beast.

It seemed to Aaron Green that this was no ordinary human being who had come to do him to death. He had feared at first only the actual passing away, but the Indian in his blood had conquered, and he had stood straight and strong of heart, fearlessly waiting to die.

Now, it was different. He had seen this man Simp-

son many times, had drunk his whisky and, together with De Quina and Red Shirt, had made trades with him for the manufacture of a certain amount of it each week, for the use of the society. This was before they purchased his plant. He had stared for a moment at this being who now stood before him, and had felt that it was not Slim Simpson, but some one else in his guise, who had come to mutter strange words about God and vengeance and death, and who looked at his naked soul and cried to him to make ready for it to pass.

"Get up!" called the man. "Get up and stand to your place!"

The preacher staggered to his feet and leaned back against the trunk of a magnolia, his face working convulsively and his hands struggling from position to position,—outstretched for mercy and uplifted in prayer.

"O God!" he cried brokenly. "I can not ask for mercy; I do not deserve it."

Cold sweat stood upon Aaron Green's face, but still the merciless and seemingly unseeing eyes of the being who had followed him held his limbs under a spell, and he could not flee. Slowly the gun was raised and he heard the sharp click of the hammer as it went back. The weapon was raised higher, and he saw no more,—he saw only the eyes that looked and looked into his soul and held him. Through some strange fancy on his part, the eyes seemed to grow in his sight as large as millstones and to revolve strangely and with unsteady motion. In the dark pupils there stood a tiny form that held a gun no longer than a hand,

This gun was directed at his heart, and he gazed at it in fascination. The eyes ceased their strange turning and glared at him, and he heard a distant voice call in a deep tone:

“Lord Jesus, pass!”

A puff of smoke rushed toward him, a curtain of black shot before his eyes, and he was done with the world. The negro’s body bounded back against the tree and slid down to a sitting posture, with the head tilted back and the mouth open. He was quite dead.

Slink now seemed to go mad, and sprang forward to worry at the dead man’s throat, but his master sent him away with a kick in his side. He tossed the gun from him and began to walk slowly up and down.

The spot where Aaron Green had met his death was a beautiful one, shaded by great magnolias, and with no bushes or small plants to break the even smoothness of the thick sheet of moss that covered a broad space under the trees. Slim Simpson strode slowly up and down, his head bowed and his right hand thrust into his bosom.

Suddenly he paused and, after gazing intently at the dead negro, whose body sat facing him, he bowed low and then began to speak.

“May it please the court,” he began, “you ask me why sentence of death should not be pronounced upon me, William Jared Ogletree, a member of this bar, for the murder of T. Washington Burns.

“On one occasion, so the story has been told to us, this useless question was asked, and it is said that Robert Emmett, the patriot and martyr, gave an answer that confused and shall confuse the defenders of

English justice until England's chalky cliffs have been claimed and conquered by the sea."

The voice rang out as in the olden days, but it sounded cracked and dead. There was the same style of the school-boy orator that, on account of his earnestness and strangely-appealing voice, had been so successful before juries when he practised criminal law in Macon. His old self had come back to him, and the ship of eloquence plowed its way once more, but there was no steady brain to hold it true to its course. He believed he had had a trial, had been convicted of the murder of the man Burns, and was now about to be sentenced to death. Slink had crept away, and lay among the bushes, silently shivering and licking his chops in fear. Slim Simpson looked up deliberately once more.

"To-day," he said, "another and a different answer shall be made. I killed T. Washington Burns and yet I did him no wrong. His soul slipped across the river and the end for him had come. He is at peace with the world, and his foibles and weaknesses are forgotten and forgiven of men. If there be a God of forgiveness up above, then surely the man has met with mercy, for he had no moment to breathe a prayer, nor yet to repent him of his sins. Upon me and me alone did the blow fall, both here and in the land beyond the stars, for already does vengeance follow me.

"You have asked a question of me and now I will ask one of you. Where and to what would you send me?

"You do not know. When the question is asked, you can only stare, and yet you would come deliber-



ately, cut the thread of life and send me whizzing on my way.

"Tell me, oh, tell me, why sit you so dumb in your gown of funereal black, you resonant-voiced mouth-piece of the law?

"Ah! We are in the world like a line of men wandering in darkness and beset with many dangers. Each man strives to send his brother ahead, though in the end he, too, must go.

"And this you would have of me. You would send me ahead to learn the great Why that no man knows.

"And so, my friend, I go, bidding you a long farewell.

"I believe that there is another world, and to that other world I go, leaving my body behind, but I am not afraid. I have to-day sent a messenger ahead in the person of Lord Jesus, and He will tell those who habit there of my coming.

"A grim old king,  
Whose blood leapt madly when the trumpets brayed  
To joyous battle 'mid a storm of steeds,  
Won a rich kingdom on a battle-day;  
But in the sunset he was ebbing fast,  
Ringed by his weeping lords. His left hand held  
His white steed, to the belly splashed with blood,  
That seemed to mourn him with its drooping head,  
His right, his broken brand: and in his ear  
His old victorious banners flap the winds,  
He called his faithful herald to his side,—  
"Go! tell the dead I come!" With a proud smile,  
The warrior with a stab let out his soul.  
Which fled and shrieked through all the other world,  
"Ye dead! My master comes!" And there was pause  
Till the great shade should enter.'

"Thus have I done to-day."

Slim Simpson gazed strangely at the body, and murmured again: "Thus have I done to-day." Then he continued in a lower tone:

"Oh, Judge! Judge of men and executor of the law! I ask you now, who is the happier man, you or I? I am about to leave you, for I feel a weakness coming over me and a sweat is breaking from every pore of my body. I am—"

He paused and stumbled. Then he passed his hand over his eyes.

"I am sick," he muttered. "Wait! It is but a passing illness, which I trust the court will pardon."

Off in the bushes Slink whimpered and whined unceasingly.

"Aha!" cried the man. "It popped again, I—heard it pop. Things are turning the other way."

He raised his hands slowly and gazed up through the branches of the great magnolia, toward where a little gray cloud went slowly sailing across the sky. Tears burst from his eyes and trickled down his cheeks, his lips trembled and he seemed to peer through and beyond it all.

"Why?" he cried with a bitter sob. "Why? O God! Why?"

He stood there for some moments and then his arms fell, but his face was still turned upward.

Again the sound of the bells came to him, toned in beauty beyond the handiwork of man, sweet as the sounds that men dream must ring in Paradise to cheer the lonely heart of God.

"The bells," he murmured. "The bells, the bells!"

and then he began to sing softly in accord with their ringing:

“On the other side of Jordan,  
In the sweet fields of Eden,  
Where the Tree of Life is blooming,  
There is rest for you.”

A glad cry broke from his lips and he stepped forward, his face beaming and his eyes shining with almost unearthly light. Then he whirled suddenly and, stumbling, fell upon his back. His eyes did not close and the same glad light remained in them. There was not even a flutter of the lids and hardly more than a gasp.

The hound rose from his place in the bushes, stared for a moment, and then crept forward and sniffed at his master's face. He stood there trembling and whining, and then, lifting his head, he sent to the skies his solemn, lonely and heartbroken wail. After a while, he lay down to wait. Now and then he whined piteously, but his watch was to the end, for a great love held him,—a love that had no change and that faltered not.

## CHAPTER XXX

### PEACE AND WAR

A week had now passed, and peace had settled once more upon the little village, but it was peace where the hip pocket bulged with the bulk of a heavy revolver and a loaded shot-gun, was always at hand. In the eyes of those whom duty called abroad by night, vague, shadowy forms flitted from tree to tree, and figures that never knew flesh or life crouched down and glared with eyes of hate from each fence-corner, bush and clump of weeds.

And yet, for all the work of the searching parties, not one of the members of the society could be found. The families of some remained for a few days, to be cared for by the company, but one after another the houses were vacated and the women and children departed in fear and often by night.

Down at the mill, among the dry-houses, armed guards walked to and fro all through the day and night and, except for their quiet tread, the great plant lay silent and deserted.

On the day following the fight, riders came thundering into the little village from neighboring parts of the county until, by noon, some three hundred had gathered there. They remained but a day or so, how-

ever, for the outbreak had been utterly crushed and, among the negroes on the surrounding plantations, the conflict between the races seemed to have no further effect than to produce a sullen silence. The cause of it all was to most of them as much of a mystery as it was to the whites, but the racial cohesion was there, and mute rebellion stirred in their hearts. They lacked weapons, however, and, further than this, they lacked a leader; they lacked a definite purpose, and, above all and beyond all, they lacked hope. Had the outbreak been successful in the beginning, the majority of them would have been swept into it, including the thousands upon thousands up in the Black Belt, for the speeches of Aaron Green had already been shaped in thought and he had but lately reread the story of Toussaint L'Ouverture, that they might know and be convinced.

Fearful lest some member of the Brotherhood should return in the night, with rifle or torch, to reap revenge, a dozen men had remained at the Traylor plantation for a week and, after they had satisfied themselves that the danger had passed, a few others still found excuses to stop in a social way and stay during the night.

The whites had been particularly fortunate, considering the great odds against them, for, although a number of them had been wounded, some of them rather severely, Josh Simpson was the only one who had as yet died.

Martin Wentworth lay in a critical condition at Captain Brantley's, where he had been carried from the mill that he might be better cared for, and Walter

Tiffin was hobbling about on a crutch from the effects of a flesh wound he had received in the leg when he and his party had rescued Martin down near the river bank.

Each time a throb shot through the wound, Walter comforted himself with the thought that his hurt had been fully avenged.

As the party had gathered round Martin and prepared to move him to Granville, Walter caught sight of a number of negroes stealing southward through the darkness toward the bridge. De Quina's feathered chapeau and dangling sword distinguished him among the rest, and Walter fired directly at him. There was a return shot which struck him in the leg. He fired again and saw De Quina fall to a sitting position near the water's edge. Some one else fired a revolver and the bullet seemed to strike the Cuban in the head, for he pitched backward on the ground. The other negroes, stooping quickly, lifted their leader up and they all plunged into the river and were at once lost in the darkness.

Upon the body of Red Shirt, the king, who lay where he had fallen under a fig tree, the victim of old Ephraim's musket and load of blue whistlers, was found a leathern pouch, suspended from his neck by a leathern cord.

It was taken from the body and left hanging for some days on a nail on the back porch. At last old Ephraim chanced upon it and swung it idly in his hand for some moments, wondering whether it might not be a hoodoo or a conjure-bag.

At last, feeling that whatever was found on the

place belonged to Mr. Traylor, and, having at the same time a superstitious dread of touching its contents, he carried it to his master, who still lay with his leg in a plaster cast.

Mr. Traylor examined the pouch with some interest. After a while, he called for a knife and cut the rough stitches with which it had been sewn. Within, he found a piece of sheet rubber, which had been used to protect the contents from moisture. He unfolded this and likewise a small piece of silk, and there dropped into his hand a tightly-folded piece of paper, very much soiled from handling and badly discolored by age.

Slowly he smoothed it out and then his hands began to tremble and an exclamation of surprise broke from his lips. It was a letter in his father's handwriting and was addressed to his mother in Boston, where she had gone after the parting. It told of the many dangers that surrounded the writer, of many of his troubles since she had gone away. It was a letter praying for forgiveness and granting forgiveness, and Mr. Traylor's eyes filled with tears as he read it.

The latter part of the letter was, apparently, written in German. Mr. Traylor gazed at it a moment and could not understand its meaning, although he was familiar with that language. He spelled a word out slowly, then sounded it aloud, but it rang false. There was no such word in the German language. He reversed the lettering and sounded it again, but he could get no meaning from it. Then, suddenly, it broke upon him; the word was French, the characters used were German and the lettering had been reversed.

Slowly he spelled it out; letter by letter and word by word he worked over it until he had read it all.

"I have accumulated about ninety thousand dollars in coin, a good part of it being gold. I have buried it under a fig tree in the yard just fifteen feet due south from the tall pine in the lane north of the house."

Mr. Traylor placed the paper under the sheet and covered his face with his hands. All his struggles were past and gone. Raised in the North, educated in the North, a student by nature and of but mediocre talents withal, he had never at any time got the best from what was his and, through misfortune and mismanagement, the profits from the plantation had for many years decreased steadily.

Utterly unselfish, he thought first of his wife and daughter. Theirs should be the pleasures and the comforts the fortune might bring. Theirs should be the care-free years, and for Virginia there should be the opportunities and the happiness that might come through a broader, wider life.

Virginia had left the room only a few moments before old Ephraim had brought in the curious pouch, and was sitting on the front porch when Doctor Mitchell drove up to make his daily call. She had watched his coming from afar.

"How is Mr. Wentworth to-day?" she asked as the young physician came up the steps.

He shook his head.

"I can hardly say," he replied. "I hope, however, that he will pull through."

"Don't you really think he will get well?" she asked.

"I hope so," he replied. "I have heard of worse



cases, but it was certainly a fortunate thing that Walter found him and brought him to Captain Brantley's when he did, otherwise he would have bled to death in a short while. You see, an artery contracts when it is torn, which it does not do if it is simply punctured or cut sharply across. Then, too, he fainted and, if he lives, these will be the things that saved him and not I."

He looked at Virginia strangely and seemed about to say something more. She waited with a quick-beating heart.

"May I see your father now?" he asked at last, and she knew he had changed his mind and, though she longed to do so, yet she did not dare to ask him of his thought.

"Sit down for a moment and I will see," she said.

She went to Mr. Traylor's room, and the moment she entered, her father called to her:

"Come here, Virginia! It is found at last!"

"What is found?"

"My father's money."

He showed her the letter and explained how he had worked out the meaning of that portion of it which was written in the German characters.

Mr. Traylor now knew that Red Shirt was none other than little Jim, his boyhood slave and the son of Ni-jim, the king, and grandson of old Ephraim, who had killed him. He meant that the old negro should never know and, indeed, except to his wife and daughter, he never told of the finding of the gold.

Now he hid the letter under his pillow.

"Tell Doctor Mitchell to come in!" he said,

There was a smile on his face and it seemed that his pain was all gone, when Virginia opened the door and the young physician entered.

"You need a shave," said the latter cheerily. "Outside of that you seem to be getting along famously. Walter thinks that De Quina is at the bottom of the river, so you will have to get well soon and shave yourself."

"Thanks!" exclaimed Mr. Traylor. "Why, he was hit twice, and I should think that with a bullet in his leg and another in his head there could be no doubt about it, after they saw those negroes jump into the river with his body."

"Well, it was whispered about among the negroes yesterday that he is not at the bottom of the river at all. They say that he limps, has turned his beard out and that his nose was partly shot away, but that he is very much alive. We have questioned a number of them about it, and they deny all knowledge of any facts and seem afraid even to discuss the rumors that have been going the rounds. Didema has been frightened nearly out of her wits and won't leave the house after dark. I suppose, though, that some one started the thing for a hoax, for I don't believe he would have waited five minutes after he was able to get about, before starting for Cuba. He is at the bottom of the river, and you are rapidly getting all right, and that is what I am interested in."

"Oh, yes, I am much better," said Mr. Traylor. "The itching goes merrily on where the bone is knitting, but otherwise I am feeling as well as I ever felt in my life."

The doctor smiled, for his patient had for some days seemed gloomy and despondent, and he was much pleased at the change.

"How is Wentworth?" asked Mr. Traylor in an anxious voice.

Doctor Mitchell's face at once grew serious.

"Wentworth is in a rather bad way," he said, "but, nevertheless, I hope for the best. His father and mother came to-day and they are at the Brantleys'. That may help him. They brought a physician with them. He is a Chicago man and stands high in the profession. Doctor Turner and I are both glad to have him here, for I have a great deal to do and Doctor Turner is not at all well. Wentworth is not having an easy time of it, by any means, but he was very strong and was in good health, and I think he will pull through."

Virginia stood at the window, gazing out across the fields.

"I can't see, for the life of me," remarked Mr. Traylor as his wife entered and, sitting down by him, pressed his forehead with her cool hand, "I simply can not understand why he went on that wild ride to the mill after he was wounded here at the house. He could have got assistance, and it was absolute folly for him to go and attack those negroes all by himself. They were afraid to try to kill Wentworth, upon crossing to this side of the river, because Hamilton was with him, and if they had been obliged to fire guns there, it might have broken up the whole plan. Yet, if Wentworth simply wanted to protect the mill, why did he not stay there instead of going farther up the river and attack-

ing the whole band? I can't understand it, for he seems to have lost his head."

"I can't figure it out, either," said Doctor Mitchell, "unless he simply wanted to—" Then he paused, for his face was toward Virginia and he saw her start quickly, while her whole attitude depicted her horror of the words that he was minded to utter.

"Unless he wanted to do what?" asked Mr. Traylor.

"To be sure that the property was protected and did not think the negroes would go farther than the woods and would then scatter," he said hurriedly. "You see," he continued, "since Mr. Oliver's strange disappearance, he felt the responsibility of caring for the whole plant greatly."

"I do certainly hope he will get well," said Mr. Traylor with a sigh. "I have always liked Wentworth, and it would grieve me beyond expression if he should die."

Doctor Mitchell soon left the room, and Virginia followed him to the porch. Her face had a wistful look and bore evidence of worry and sleeplessness.

"Do you think there is anything that we—that I could do for him or could send to him?" she asked.

He was silent a long time,—so long that the hearts of both beat quickly at the waiting.

"Not now, anyway," he said at last. "Perhaps later; you can tell better than than I."

He hurried down the steps with a quick good-by and was gone. She watched his buggy far down the road until it disappeared from view. Then she sat down and, breaking a leaf from a plant growing in a flower-pot near her, chewed idly at its stem. A de-

sire to go to him came over her,—to go to him in spite of them all and drop on her knees by his bedside and ask him for forgiveness; to put her face against his pillow and pray for him.

Once she had been to the house, but Jessica had met her at the door with flushed cheeks.

“You can do nothing,” she had said. “They will not let you see him. I will send you word about his condition.”

She had turned away, feeling almost as though the door was barred to her. There were no flowers to send from the yard, for they had all been trampled under foot and broken down. She could do nothing, absolutely nothing, and Jessica had not only not been to see her, but she had not even sent a single message.

Each day Shack was sent to Granville for the mail. He always stopped to obtain information regarding Martin’s condition, and his report to Virginia seldom varied. Didema had returned to Captain Brantley’s after De Quina disappeared and, in spite of his former poor luck in attracting the girl’s affections, Shack still continued to hope. He spoke of her as “de widder” and his information in regard to Martin’s condition was usually obtained from her. On this particular day, he returned shortly after Doctor Mitchell left.

“Yas’m,” he said as he stood in the yard, hat in hand, “he des erbout de same. De ain’t no special change an’ hit lays betwix’ er flicker an’ er hang-on.”

Virginia rose and walked slowly up and down the porch. A feeling of bitterness against Jessica smote her heart, but after a few moments she succeeded in quelling it,

"She ought to let me know, anyway," she murmured. "It was for the sake of our family that he came. He is hers, but she could at least let me show human sympathy."

In his room at the Brantley home, Martin lay at that moment staring at the ceiling with feverish, unseeing eyes. He had been restless and had talked almost continuously when not under the influence of some drug.

"The fish we caught at Palmetto Springs," he said suddenly. "Such a great big fish!" He laughed hoarsely and then lay panting.

"The two Cape Jessamine bushes," he murmured again. "You stood by the gate, Virginia, and there was the Cape Jessamine, and I couldn't find my hat."

Here he began to sob, and his mother stood by to quiet him. He gazed up at her and frowned.

"Go away!" he cried. "I know you; you told her to do it. She struck me in the face, and then dozens of them came and tried to kill me, but they couldn't do it. You told her to do it, and I'll kill you some day, when I get my gun fixed. It's got sand in it, but I'll blow the top of your head off."

His voice broke and went into a weak wail.

"Oh, Virginia! Virginia!" he moaned.

Mrs. Wentworth turned away with tears in her eyes. She went out into the hall and called Jessica.

"What is it about this Virginia that causes him to rave so and repeat her name all the time?" she asked.

Jessica's face was white and there were dark circles under her eyes. It was the face of one who tossed at night upon a sleepless pillow praying for day; of one who crept often from her bed and, unmindful of her-

self, sat shivering upon the chilly stairway, listening for sounds from his room, her pounding heart tortured with fear of the silence when he slept, lest it be the silence of death. Sometimes, with her hands pressed to her bosom, she would call in a whisper: "Oh, Virginia! Virginia! You can not love him so!"

Now her face grew even paler than usual at Mrs. Wentworth's words.

"You will not tell if I explain?" she asked. "It is a secret and, if he gets well, you must not even mention it to him or ever let him know I told you."

"I shall certainly not repeat it, if you request me not to do so," said Mrs. Wentworth.

"She hates him," said Jessica slowly and without a tremor in her voice.

"But he calls out that she struck him in the face. I don't understand that."

"I think he tried to kiss her and she slapped his face. She is very proud and high-strung, and I don't believe he cares very much for her, but on account of the trouble at her house that night, he seems to have got it all mixed up. He seldom went to call on her, but I think he did try to kiss her just for fun and she struck him in the face."

"The miserable cat!" muttered Mrs. Wentworth under her breath. Then she thanked Jessica for the information and returned to the room.

Out at the Traylor plantation, Virginia still sat upon the veranda, her hands clasped and her eyes gazing down the Granville road. She covered her face with her hands and her quivering lips moved slowly; she was praying for him,

## CHAPTER XXXI

### PEACE AGAIN

In the far South, the last sobbing winds of February had passed and gone. With March and the sunshine of her middle days, the woods had grown green and on every side there was blossom and song and a full awakening of the year. Here it did not seem as a resurrection after death, but rather an awakening from refreshing sleep, for something here and there had gleamed and greened with life during all the winter months.

Three weeks had now passed since Martin had left Granville with his parents for his home in Michigan.

After the first improvement in his condition had begun, his wounds healed rapidly. It seemed, however, that his strength would not return, and it was indeed a thin, white face that rested against the pillows piled about him in the carriage as it stood waiting to leave the little village.

Many had come to bid him good-by, but the listless eyes had little light and he closed them often in weariness. He was so tired of it all,—tired in body, tired in mind and tired at heart.

Jessica came at last and, standing by the carriage with a face almost as white as his own, took the trem-



stronger. She knew that somehow she must be glad, and yet she could not feel one inward evidence that it was true.

One morning it was noised about the village that some one had shot at Walter with a rifle some nights before. There had been three shots, one of which struck the horn of his saddle, another missed and the third slightly wounded his horse. He had emptied his revolver in the direction of the flashes, but Sir Roger had plunged so wildly that there was little accuracy in his firing.

He told of the occurrence to three men and planned with them to discover the attempted assassin. One of these told his wife, who promptly refused to allow him to join in the search, and some days later berated Walter severely for having, as she expressed it, "tried to get him murdered."

"Who could it be?" the people wondered. And when, a night or two later, Didema came shrieking through the darkness with a wound in her shoulder, they wondered still more.

"I never heerd er soun'," she protested wildly. "I wuz in de clear open uv de road when sump'n hit me."

Armed men went with lanterns and examined the vicinity. They could find no trace of any one. Didema had declared that she saw no one; that she had heard no sound and that it was impossible for any one to have stabbed her in the shoulder with a knife, although a physician declared that it had the appearance of a knife-wound, delivered with terrific force.

At last some one saw an object standing straight out from a fence post. They examined it and found

that it was an arrow with a long, stout shaft of oak, headed with a heavy knife-blade, wired and leaded, in its socket.

When this was shown to Didema, she began to shriek and sob with fear.

"Hit's him," she cried. "Hit's Lope. He tol' me onct how he had ter hide out in er war in er country called Dermingo, an' he didn' had no gun fer six mont's, but he kilt birds wid er bow an' arrer, he could shoot um so good. Oh Lawdy mussy! I got ter leab dis country. He gwineter kill me sho fer tellin' 'bout de risin', an' he de same whut shot at Mars' Walter."

Jessica felt it her duty to caution Walter, so she sent for him and at last secured from him a promise that he would not ride abroad at night.

Dogs were sent for, but they were got too late and could never find the trail. As for Didema, there was no further danger on that score, for she entered her room with the coming of darkness and kept a fierce cur locked in with her for protection and company. She tried to persuade other women to come and occupy the room with her, but they refused to do so. To them, she was marked for death and they shunned her.

So Didema shivered herself to sleep each night, armed with a hatchet and a carving-knife, and thinking favorably of Shack's suit because of the protection a man would afford; but Shack had heard the news and came no more.

On a sunshiny morning in the latter part of March, Jessica, assisted by Didema, was working in her flower garden. She paused to gaze at the old arrangement of the flower beds and a sigh escaped her.

"I don't seem to care much about it, any more," she murmured. "I've lost interest, somehow."

Since the horrible affair at the Traylor plantation, the two girls had remained rather closely at home. The trip to Richmond had been abandoned and, except on Sundays when they met at church, they saw little of each other.

"I bet de yard at home be comin' out fine soon," said Didema suddenly. "Dey sez dat de mens tromped down all de roses, but dey done trimmed um up, an' dat wuz whut dey wuz er-needin', anyhow."

"At home?" queried Jessica.

"Yas'm! Out ter de planashun."

"Why, isn't this your home?"

"Yas'm," she said slowly. "I spec hit am, but Miss Jessie, yer know dat I wuz bawn an' raised on dat place. Yer been mighty good ter me, but some days I gits ter studyin' 'bout Miss Ferginia an' mer heart mighty nigh bustes. Mr. Traylor, he 'low ez how I wuz mixed up wid dat uprisin' business at de beginnin' an' dat I got skeered an' backed down when I foun' out dat dey wuz gwineter kill me, too. He say dat I cain' put mer foot on dat place no mo'."

Tears sprang into Didema's eyes, and she stooped and busied herself with some plants that she might hide them.

Jessica noted the action.

"You like Miss Virginia more than you do me, then," she said.

Didema was silent.

"Do you?"

"Miss Jessie, please, ma'am, doan' ax' me dat. Mer

heart done had so much trubble dat I doan' know whut ter do. I lubs you 'kase you is allus been so good ter me, but I worshifies Miss Ferginia. She been mer goddin angel."

Jessica walked to the gate and, leaning upon it, rested her chin on her hand.

So, after all, she was thinking, everything was for Virginia. Even the negroes liked her better and would not deny it.

"Oh, well! What do I care?" she murmured in utter desperation. "I can't care about anything any more."

She went to the parlor and, sitting down at the piano, began to play softly. In a few moments Ditema came and handed her some letters. She placed them in her lap without examining them and continued to play. Then, seating herself in a rocker, she took them up and glanced at the envelops. One was from Mrs. Wentworth; she would read that first. So she tore it open carelessly and began to read. Suddenly her breast began to heave,—fear and horror showed on her face and a cry escaped her lips.

"Oh, my blessed God! He is going to die; he is going to die!" she panted.

Her own words seemed only to add to and intensify her emotion. Now it all swept upon her like a storm. Everything she had been spared during the dumb, empty days since he had gone; every grief, every fear, every agony of heart, rushed upon her in one moment until it seemed she would die. She fell on the floor and, groveling there, moaned and moaned, crying in her agony:

"Oh, God! He is going to die! Martin is going to die!"

She endeavored to rise that she might go and cry it out to some one, not remembering that she was alone in the house.

"Oh, my Father in Heaven!" she moaned. "Take me and spare him! Let me go and let him live!"

A sudden wild thought came to her and, with its coming, the room swam in her sight and she slid back fainting on the floor, the letter falling from her hand.

"I write to you in a last desperate hope," it began. "You will realize the pass to which I have come when I tell you this.

"After we came home Martin seemed to improve, but the interest in the old scenes passed away in a few days and he again began to lose. So it has gone from day to day. At first, he would have his chair rolled to a window facing the south, and there he would sit and stare, hour after hour, with sad, wistful eyes. Now he has grown so weak that he can not leave his bed,—but that, too, must face the south, where he can gaze out of a window.

"The doctors say that, unless he can be got to take an interest in something, he will surely die. The shock was so great that it must take some extraordinary happiness to make him try to get well, for it seems that he does not care to live. There is some great grief that bears him down, and if you can help me, please, please tell me what it is and gain the everlasting devotion of a heart that is breaking with grief. You knew him so well that if it was anything at Granville, you must know.

"Yesterday, as I sat beside him and took his hand, he whispered: 'Mother, if I die, promise me that I shall die facing the south.'

"You can not realize how terrible it is, just to watch him fading and fading, when I know there is something hidden from me. If this something can be righted, it will save him. He believes, of course, that it all comes from his terrible hurts, but the doctors say that while they put him in this condition, still his wonderful recuperative powers pulled him through the danger from the wounds themselves while he was unable to worry. Now, what he needs is to get a grasp on life and to get away from the thing that haunts him and depresses him. There seems, too, to be a sympathy between his mental condition and his bodily hurts, for he suffers a great deal. If he can be aroused and made to care, he will get well, but it must be done at once, otherwise, the doctors tell us plainly, he will surely die. We have tried everything and unless you can help me, I give up, for you are my only hope."

This was what Jessica read, and this was what caused her to faint. After a long while, she crept slowly back to consciousness and, with the letter in her hand, staggered to her room, weak and sick and white.

She sat down to try to collect her thoughts. Then she secured a wine-glass and, filling it with sherry, drank it, that she might gain strength.

With the coming of strength, she washed her face, smoothed her hair and, putting on her hat, went down and ordered her horse and phaeton to be brought round to the front gate. A few minutes later, she entered the vehicle, and, after passing through the village, drove

rapidly along the road leading toward the Traylor home. Reaching the house and seeing no one, she entered and, walking rapidly through the hall, reached Virginia's room and tapped on the door. There was no response. Going out on the back porch, she encountered old Dilcey.

"Why, howdy-do, ma'am! Howdy-do!" exclaimed the old negress, her face wrinkling with smiles of greeting.

"Where is Virginia?" asked the girl.

"She an' de balance is done gone down ter de orchid."

"Send word to her that I am here!" she said.

Dilcey went into the kitchen and, thrusting her head out of the window, shouted:

"You Scrap! O-o-h Scrap!"

An infantile voice answered in the distance.

"Go ter de orchid an' tell yo' young mistis dat Miss Jessie air here! Hurry up, now!"

Jessica returned to Virginia's room and sat down to wait. After a while she heard the well-known footsteps, and in a moment Virginia came into the room.

"Why, hello, Jess!" she cried. "I am certainly glad to see you. Come out on the porch; it is more pleasant out there."

She advanced to kiss Jessica, but the latter drew back.

"Shut the door and lock it, so that we shall not be disturbed," commanded Jessica.

Virginia did as she was bidden, but there was a puzzled look on her face.

"Now then, sit down!"

She smiled and took a seat as she was bidden.

Jessica strode over to her; her face was pale, her hands were clenched and her eyes had a hard look in them.

"Virginia Traylor, do you love Martin Wentworth?" she asked in a fierce tone.

The color fled from Virginia's cheeks and her eyes lighted with anger.

"I see that you do," said Jessica. "I knew it already. Now, don't stop me! Don't lie and say you do not, and don't tell me it is none of my affair. You may keep your boiling down, too, for I am going to do the talking for a few minutes. I came out here for a purpose far higher than anger or resentment, and I don't propose to be thwarted by a scene. You keep your seat and let me finish what I must say!"

Virginia rose and started toward the door.

"Sit down and listen to what I have to say, or you will regret it all the days of your life," cried Jessica. "Come back and sit down!"

Virginia turned and, after gazing at her visitor for a moment, sank into a chair.

"I will hear it out," she said coldly. "I will let you reach the limit of your insolence. I will find out the heart of you."

"Yes, you will find out the heart of me," cried Jessica bitterly. "You will find it out, for I will bare it and show it to you for what it is. You love Martin Wentworth and he loves you. I loved him, too, and far better than you ever loved him or ever will love him. I say this with unblushing cheeks, for this has



gone from me for ever. When I told you on the train, as we were going to Mobile, that he had told me he loved me and had asked me to marry him and I had accepted him, I lied to you from beginning to end. There was not one word of truth in the whole story, except that I loved him. He never made love to me in his life. I put you under solemn oath not to breathe a word of it nor to let any one know that you knew, not even Martin Wentworth himself. You took the oath,—I told you the lie. I hoped to win him from you, for I knew that he loved you. Besides this, I have told him a number of lies to carry the thing out. I have told him lies on you.”

Virginia was horror-struck at the story and, bowing her head in her hands, began to sob bitterly.

“Oh, you are surprised that I did it! You wonder that I have not fallen on my knees before you with blushes of shame,” cried Jessica. “You wonder why I do not sob it out at full length on the floor. I think my tears are all gone.”

She paused and gazed down at her once plump and beautifully rounded figure and touched her white cheek with her finger.

“You may have wondered, too, why I look this way; why I have been almost a crazy woman for months, and now you know. If you could have heard him in his delirium calling for you and had to stand it as I did, you would know. Oh, I wanted to confess long, long ago, but the thing that impelled me to what I did in the beginning held me back, and, besides, I was a coward and I did not want to lose. Now I want to be rid of it all. He made love to you, I know,

and you rejected him on my account, although you love him. Now I have come to-day to tell you that unless you write to him, and write to him at once, and tell him you do love him and will marry him, he is going to die. I had a letter from his mother, and unless you do this, I tell you he will die! Do you realize it? *Die* is what I said. Do this at once, for, unless you do, I am going to write him to-day and tell him the whole truth about the matter from beginning to end and then kill myself. I would rather that my memory should be whitewashed for my parents' sake; but that can go, too, to save him."

She stopped and snapped her fingers.

"What do I care?" she cried bitterly. "I am going to end it all. I don't want to live, and they can't show me a worse hell than I have had in my heart. I have come to the end. If I can save him, I don't care."

Virginia rose to her feet with the tears streaming down her face.

"Oh, for God's sake, Jess, don't talk that way! It's not you. You've been sick," she cried in a choking voice.

"Yes, for God's sake!" said Jessica with a sneer. "That's a pretty speech! What have I to ask of God? For *Love's* sake, rather. Such things do women do for *Love's* sake!"

She stood for a moment silent and then turned blindly toward the door, putting her hand to her forehead as though in pain. Virginia ran to her with a cry and tried to catch her in her arms, but Jessica whirled on her like a tigress.

"Don't you touch me!" she cried fiercely. "Don't

you dare to touch me! I'm mad, I tell you. I am less than a dog, but, by Heaven! don't you lay a finger on me! I will tear your eyes out!"

Virginia staggered as though she had been struck a blow in the face.

"Oh, Jess!" she cried brokenly. "How could you say that to me! How could you! How could you!"

Jessica stumbled blindly toward the door.

"I mean it," she mumbled. "I hate you, but I'll save him; I'll save Martin with the letter."

Then she staggered suddenly, stumbled against a table and fell with a crash to the floor, striking her head violently. Virginia ran to her with a cry of horror and dropped on her knees beside the still figure, kissing the white lips and calling her name. Then, opening the door, she fled out into the hall, crying loudly for help.

One week passed and then another went by, and Jessica Brantley still lay white and weak on a bed at the Traylor home. The fever had passed, and her violet eyes studied the ceiling wistfully. Her illness had been a dangerous one, but now it had left her and all she needed was time in which to recover strength.

Virginia had been waiting outside for Shack to come with the mail and, a few minutes after his return, she came in and sat upon the edge of the bed. Her cheeks were glowing, her eyes shone brightly and a suppressed excitement pervaded her whole being.

"How do you feel now, dear?" she asked softly.

"Better, I thank you," murmured Jessica with a sigh.

Virginia leaned over to kiss her.

"No! no!" cried Jessica quickly. Her weak hands

were raised in a repellent attitude and she turned her face away. Virginia caught the girl's cheeks between her hands and kissed her again and again. The tears sprang to Jessica's eyes and she moaned piteously.

"Why did you? Oh, how could you, how could you forgive me?" she cried.

"Because, dear heart, I love you and it was not you," murmured her friend, and she kissed her again, and this time Jessica understood and did not resist.

Hot tears were still streaming down her face, but in her eyes a light had crept, and it was the light of hope.

"Thank God!" she murmured. "Thank God! Thank God!"

Virginia went softly from the room, and in a few minutes she returned and placed a big white rose in the sick girl's hand. Wonderfully fragrant it was and still wet with dew—the rose of pure, true love; the rose of forgiveness and of peace.

## CHAPTER XXXII

“YER GOT TER DO ER LI’L LEANIN’ ”

It was the middle of May. This, in southern Alabama, is the most beautiful month of all the year ; the month when the land is literally aflame with blossom, when white magnolias stand like cups of snow among the dark, glossy leaves ; when the fragrant honeysuckle perfumes each passing breeze and the swamp laurel lines the banks of streams with its miles and miles of beautiful bloom.

Lazy white clouds, like lost wisps of cotton, go wandering across a turquoise sky or, gathering together in one mighty, fleecy bulk, tumble and roll and slowly unfold, their lower borders tinged with a clean pearl gray, the harbinger of a crystal shower to gladden the wealth of perfume and color that nods and blooms below.

The railroad had been completed to within a few miles of Granville and the work was being energetically carried on. Hamilton had, however, been temporarily replaced by another engineer. Constant exposure and the drinking of swamp water had been too much for him, and he lay ill with fever in Martin Wentworth’s old room at the company offices.

One evening Walter and Jessica walked over from

the village to the mill. Doctor Mitchell had told them that Hamilton was now much better, and Jessica had gathered a great armful of roses, that the sick man might have something of the brightness and cheer of the outdoor world.

They stayed a little while, and then, coming out upon the white road, they sauntered slowly along on the homeward way.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” she exclaimed at last, looking upward at the sky. “And we don’t appreciate things either,” she continued. “This world of ours is perhaps more beautiful than all those worlds up there, and yet we strain after an understanding of them and forget the beautiful things about us that are our own, our very own.”

Walter smiled sadly.

“Oh, well, Jess,” he said, “each one of us has a star somewhere, a great, yellow, golden star,—a star of the evening. Perhaps that star is near us, perhaps it is the nearest thing in our every-day lives, but in our hearts we place it up yonder; we lift it and set it apart from ourselves and then we yearn after it, believing it is different from what it is. We make our stars, Jess, most of us.”

She turned and looked at him strangely. “You are bitter, Walter,” she said softly. Then she added slowly: “But perhaps you are right.” She looked upward again. “Sometimes the something that is near us is placed up yonder and called a star. We think it is a star and the silly little thing thinks, too, that it is a star, and so it preens itself and glitters and twinkles in the reflected light of the heart that placed

it there. But then there comes a wind, the wind that blows between the worlds, the cold wind that blows between human hearts and then the star, the silly little thing of tinsel and flitter and repeated light, knows itself for what it is, Walter, and it wants to come down; it wants to come down and be close to the good, warm heart of mother earth—it just wants to snuggle down where it belongs and be ashamed for a while, be very ashamed, and then—be forgiven.”

Some of her meaning Walter believed he understood, the rest was too vague for him to grasp.

“I don’t know that I quite understand you,” he said at last.

“I didn’t mean for you to,” she replied, laughing softly. “Men can not understand the thoughts of women, anyway.”

“Oh, then it has a meaning after all,” he said in a bantering tone.

“To be sure,” she retorted, “there is always a meaning in what a woman says, though it is frequently like an overloaded gun; it kicks backward. She doesn’t really know what is in it until after she has let fly with it. The same thing holds true with what she does,” she added.

They both laughed and went on their way.

“I’m to be bridesmaid,” she said at last, as they neared the bridge.

“What is the date?” he asked.

“June second. Virginia told me that she will be in to-morrow to see you. There will be a lot of people here from up North, and you have got to act pretty and entertain them.”

Walter wondered at the self-possession with which she spoke of it all.

He had long since understood, and, although Virginia had attempted to hide it from him, he had felt, without being told, the truth of what had taken place at the Traylor home. His heart now beat quickly at the thought.

“Perhaps she does not care so much, after all,” he was thinking. “Perhaps, perhaps—”

They had now passed half-way over the Granville bridge, when a figure stirred for a moment and then rose silently in the midst of the clump of sweet-gum bushes, behind which Slim Simpson had hidden on the morning when he had seen the negro, Ase, go running by. The figure rose to its full height and then, from that clump of bushes, something sped noiselessly through the gloom.

Walter staggered and reeled toward the railing of the bridge, catching at it with his hands for support. His body lurched violently against it and there was the sharp, quick snap, as of a breaking stick. The broken shaft of an arrow fell at his feet—it had struck him in the left groin.

“What is it, Walter?” cried Jessica in alarm. “I heard something strike you.”

“Nothing, nothing,” he replied between his clenched teeth.

He clung to the railing with his left hand and with the other he drew his revolver,—the revolver that he had always carried since the night of the trouble with the negroes.

He fired a quick shot into the clump of bushes, and



then suddenly there was a crash and a figure burst through them and ran southward along the river bank, limping as it ran. Walter followed it slowly with his aim, although he swayed with pain and weakness. At last he fired; the figure paused, stumbled, whirled, and rolled down the steep bank. It struck a projection, bounded from it and fell with a great splash into the water below.

Walter stared and waited, but all was silent.

"I got him; it was De Quina," he cried.

He placed the pistol upon the top of the railing and, with a groan, sank to the floor of the bridge.

"He hit me pretty bad, Jess," he said in a weak voice. "Guess you'll have to go on alone. Have them send Mitchell. It's a trifle painful."

Jessica, trembling with fear, turned half-doubtfully to go, dreading, however, to leave him.

A pool of blood was forming quickly on the flooring of the bridge at his side. He reached weakly for his hat and placed it over it, to hide it from her view. But Jessica had seen and knew why he did it.

In an instant she was on her knees beside him, sobbing in terror and grief. His head fell back through faintness from his agony, but she caught his face in her hands and kissed his lips again and again.

He smiled feebly and patted her arm gently.

"There, little girl, don't cry," he murmured. "It's not so bad; it will be all right."

Jessica kissed him again and, springing to her feet, gathered up her skirts and sped through the darkness toward the little village, with fast-falling tears and a sobbing cry in her throat.

As she reached the bottom of the hill she almost ran over a small boy, coming along with his hands in his pockets, whistling loudly.

“Run, run!” she cried, seizing him by the arm. “Go tell Doctor Mitchell to come to the bridge as fast as his horse can run. Tell him that some one has shot Walter Tiffin.”

The boy gasped.

“Good Lord!” he cried. “The niggers are risin’ again!” and he darted up the hill as though the fiends of darkness were at his heels.

Doctor Mitchell was just getting into his buggy at Anderson and Tiffin’s store when the boy dashed frantically up and gasped out his story. He put the whip to his horse and in a few minutes he had reached the bridge.

Walter was lying on his back, with his head in Jessica’s lap. Her hands were caressing his own and her tears were falling silently upon him.

Doctor Mitchell scratched a match and knelt beside him.

“They tried it again, Doc,” Walter murmured faintly, “but they failed at it again. I’m destined for a better fate than that, I suppose.”

“Well, I should say you are,” said Doctor Mitchell. “Fate is kind to you right now!”

The wounded man smiled feebly.

“It’s awfully good of her,” he murmured.

Soon Doctor Mitchell had stanchd the flow of blood. He lifted Walter into the buggy, placed Jessica beside him, and, standing behind them, drove rapidly toward town.

"To our house—to my home," she said, "and nowhere else."

"All right," replied the doctor, smiling again. "I don't know of a better place for him."

As the days passed, Walter's wound began to heal and he improved rapidly.

"A wound like that hurts like sin," said Doctor Mitchell one day, "but Walter can certainly thank his stars that it was an arrow instead of a bullet, otherwise it would have shattered his hip. De Quina, no doubt, got his bowstring caught in the bushes some way, otherwise he would have shot higher. Let's all be thankful for that."

"Oh, I am thankful all right," said Walter, as he lay smiling up into his friend's face. "I am more than thankful—I am, as Bob, the porter, would say—plum' satisfied. All I want to know is whether I shall be able to go to the wedding."

"Oh, I'll have you there all right," laughed Doctor Mitchell, "but you'll be on crutches. I don't believe they would have it unless you could be there."

At last the day rolled around. The railroad had been completed to the mill, the last few miles of track having been hurriedly laid, so that the private train that backed in from the main line might stop at the company offices. The little station was to be erected nearer the old Granville bridge when the road should be carried on through to the Gulf.

Martin had been elected president of the new road, and the train that bore him and his party was known as the president's train.

The wedding out at the Traylor plantation was over

and, as Martin and Virginia were riding along the dusty road under the great, silent stars, he called to the driver to stop and, stepping from the vehicle, cut for her a branch of fragrant crab-apple blossoms, gave them to her, and they drove on again toward Granville, toward the river and toward the president’s train.

“So sweet!” she murmured, as she buried her face among them.

But he was looking up at the stars.

“Yes,” he whispered with rapt face. “’Tis sweet, the world! So sweet!”

Down at the train, the party was soon on board. There was happy laughter and a few happy tears.

There came a long, loud blast from the whistle that echoed for miles and miles. Slowly at first, then faster, the president’s train took its departure.

Back from where it had gone, a white-headed negro, dressed in an old-fashioned and ill-fitting evening suit and wearing a battered silk hat, stood in the middle of the track, watching the strange spectacle until the last reflection from the engine’s furnace had faded in the night. There was a faint, lone whistle and then only a distant, rumbling roar.

He staggered from the track and, regardless of his finery, sat down on a pile of cross-ties. The tears burst from his eyes and he began to sob aloud. An old negro woman, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, came and stood by him and tried to comfort him.

“She comin’ back, Unc Ephraham,” she said softly, as she placed her hand on his shoulder.

But he only shook his head and continued to sob.

"She gone, Dilcey," he said. "She done gone!"

Walter was standing near them, leaning heavily on his cane, while Jessica stood beside him, staring through the darkness up the road.

"You ought not to cry that way, Uncle Eph," said Walter. "You ought to be glad, for she is very happy."

The old negro rose quickly to his feet, lifted his hat and hastily brushed the tears from his cheeks.

"Oh, I ain't er-cryin', Mars' Walter, I ain't er-cryin'," he said. "Dat ain't nothin' but joy sobbance, whut I is er-doin', but—but I is gwinter miss her so,"— and he went off again into a broken wail.

"She is going to come back and live right here," said Walter, "so you will have her with you all the days of your life."

Uncle Ephraim at last came close to him and gazed at him intently.

"Mars' Walter," he said, "I sho hates to see yer crippled up datter way. Dey wuz er time," he continued mournfully, "when I wuz er-hopin'—yassuh, I sho wuz er-hopin' dat you an' de baby wuz er gwinter sorter be mo'an des frien's. Yer rickolleck de time yer fout fer her long time ergo in de baby days? 'Twuz den I sot mer heart on hit, but you an' Miss Jessie—why, hit seem dat de Lawd des 'range de business fer yer two."

Jessica flushed, but said nothing.

"You is des lak two chillun yit ter po' ol' Ephraim," he continued softly. "An' now here yer is all cripple' up, an' she de strong one now. Bimeby you gwinter be strong erg'in an' den maybe she be sorter cripple'. Dat's de way wid de heart, Mars'

Walter. I doan' keer how strong nobody's heart mout be, hit am sorter cripple', hit sholy air, an' hit got ter do er li'l leanin' sometime."

The tears rolled down his black withered cheeks and he raised his hands above them.

"Yer is bofe her bestes' frien's," he said brokenly; "yer is bofe strong an' yer is bofe weak. God bless yer bofe!"

They turned from him in silence. Jessica ran her arm through Walter's and helped him over the tracks, as they made their way slowly toward the buggy. Their heads were bowed and their hearts were too full for words.

A glad smile crept into the old negro's face as he gazed at them through the gloom.

"Yer got ter do er li'l leanin' in dis worl'," he murmured softly. "Yer got ter do er li'l leanin'."

**THE END**

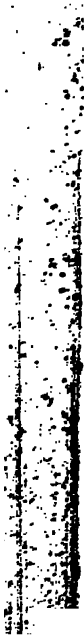








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